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THE
HEIRESS
OF
CASTLE VALE

OR
A Fair Plebeian

By
MAY E. STONE

No. 84. October, 1892

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CHICAGO
LAIRD & LEE
PUBLISHERS



THE HEIRESS OF CASTLE VALE.

THE HEIRESS OF CASTLE VALE

—OR—

A FAIR PLEBEIAN

—BY—

MAY E. STONE

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CHICAGO:
LAIRD & LEE, PUBLISHERS
1892

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As rich as the finest fur cloak,
And for handsome design
You just should see mine—

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THE HEIRESS OF CASTLE VALE

—OR—

A FAIR PLEBEIAN

CHAPTER I.

THE HINKLEYS — AN ANCIENT FAMILY.

What's Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba,
That he should weep for her?

—*Hamlet.*

MISS HESTER HINKLEY took off her spectacles and wiped them.

Not that there is anything unusual in this act, do I chronicle it at the beginning of my story—most elderly people do likewise—but for the indubitable fact: whenever Miss Hinkley was a trifle moved from a certain complacency, as natural and fitting to her as the close shirred cap she always wore, she was sure to manifest it by drawing forth an immaculate white cambric handkerchief (folded with the most careful precision) and applying it to the lenses of her spectacles.

This afternoon, she rubbed them vigorously, which betrayed that Miss Hester was a good deal moved. Readjusting the spectacles with great exactness upon the bridge of her nose, she proceeded to re-read a letter which she held in her hand. It was a curious letter;

short, cold and very magisterial. One perceived, instantly, that it was written by a limb of the law—by one who understood his business too thoroughly to indulge in superfluous words.

MISS HESTER HINKLEY, OF HINKLEY PARK—

MADAM: Your sister, Rebecca Kaw, wife of deceased Richard Kaw, is dead. (Not modified in the least, but straight to the point. Could he have divined Miss Hester's proclivities?) She leaves one child, a girl, without property. Will you take her, or shall I consign her to one of the charitable institutions of this city? Please reply.

Yours, etc.,

BLACKMAR AND HICKEY,
Attorneys at Law.

"So Rebecca is dead," said Miss Hinkley, calmly, as she folded her letter and replaced it in the envelope. "Well, I am not surprised—we all die sooner or later. I think she might have known better, however, than to leave me a child to bring up; but it is like her—foolish to the very last.

"To be sure I shall take the girl. A Hinkley never yet found a home in a charitable institution. We have always been a noble, influential family as far back as I can trace; and that is—let me see—to my sixteenth great grandfather. There has never been a stain upon the family escutcheon, until Rebecca married Richard Kaw. She did unwisely and received her just deserts. Her child, however, is a Hinkley; I shall take her and bring her up as becomes a Hinkley."

Arriving at this sage conclusion, Miss Hester

drew a small, ivory inlaid escritoire toward her, and producing from it writing material, proceeded to indite the following characteristic epistle :

MESSRS. BLACKMAR AND HICKEY, ATTORNEYS AT LAW—

SIRS: You may forward the girl immediately.

-Yours, with respect,

HESTER HINKLEY,
Of Hinkley Park.

Not a word wasted. Miss Hester would have made a good lawyer herself.

Ringling a bell, she summoned a servant.

“John,” she commanded, “take this letter at once to the post-office; return, and at precisely the stroke of three let the carriage be at the door. I shall ride.”

Then Miss Hinkley donned her black bonnet, and taking the book of “Daily Prayer” from a shelf, read diligently until the carriage was announced. She descended, and seating herself precisely in the middle of the old-fashioned coach—not an inch farther to the right than to the left—was driven slowly down the avenue and out at the park gates.

As Miss Hester had said, the Hinkleys of Hinkley Park were people of importance. They had emigrated to America in very early times—one Sir Hinkley being appointed Governor of a flourishing English colony. The present estate had remained in the family ever since that memorable event; and, as each new owner came into possession, he proudly signified it by contributing something to the old mansion—a

new wing or a jutting alcove—until at last but little of the original structure remained. During the life of the late Madison Hinkley, quite extensive repairs had been made, and at the present date the picturesque old pile, with its heterogeneous mixture of antique and modern architecture, resembled a castle of Queen Anne's time with nineteenth-century improvements. It attracted travelers far and near; and of the many strolling artists who thronged this vicinity during the summer months, not one failed to carry away with him a sketch of Hinkley Park.

'Squire Madison—the original title having degenerated into esquire, owing to Americanism—died without male issue. The entire property, therefore, descended, or would have descended, I should say, to his two daughters, but for the atrocious act perpetrated by the younger—Rebecca—who fell in love and secretly married a strolling artist— young Richard Kaw. She reaped her reward. The old man disowned her and thrust her from his door, and upon his death the entire property fell to Hester, who, it is said, never committed the atrocity of falling in love with any living creature but herself and her long line of defunct grandfathers.

The difference between the sisters in girlhood days had been very marked. Hester was hard and cold and plain of face, while Rebecca was a golden-haired, sunny-hearted beauty. To this day the people of the little village loved to talk of Rebecca Hinkley's famous beauty. Many a time have I listened to a glowing description of her sweet peach-colored face and

her wondrous hair that shone like gold ; many a time have I heard tell of her gentle smile and kindly words to even the meanest kind.

She was dead now, and her sister ruled supreme at Hinkley Park.

There need be no occasional twinges of conscience to remind Miss Hester of that wandering one—she could enjoy the old ancestral home in peace.

She had not wept at the news of Rebecca's death. Why should she ? They had nothing in common—these two—there had been little enough love between them in the old days. She would do her duty, however, she argued—the dead one's child should find a home beneath her roof.

CHAPTER II.

MR. BLACKMAR'S CALL.

My poverty, but not my will, consents.

—*Shakespeare.*

THE ponderous knocker to the widow Beal's respectable boarding-house in Norl street, Boston, was lifted and dropped just three consecutive times.

This was an established rule with Mr. Blackmar, of Blackmar and Hickey, attorneys at law, and was recognized everywhere. Three, regular, forcible knocks, meant Mr. Blackmar at the door, as much as if you stood watching him from your parlor window.

"Mr. Blackmar!" exclaimed the widow before the last reverberation had ceased, "and at this time of day! What can he want?"

She leisurely tucked up several stray locks of hair and straightened her collar; knowing well that another fixed rule with the much regular attorney, was to wait just five minutes by the watch, after the last rap, before descending the steps and going away. He was a widower, and it was well to be on the safe side; so half of the allotted time had elapsed before the widow made her way through the long hall and opened the front door.

"Why, Mr. Blackmar!" she simpered, assuming a surprised look.

"Is Miss Katharine Kaw within?"

"I believe she is. Poor thing, I feel dretful——"

"Tell her I wish to communicate with her."

"So I will. Walk into the parlor, Mr. Blackmar, and take the declining chair." The widow Beal was famous for her long words, and if she sometimes misapplied them she was blissfully ignorant of the fact. "It was in this very room that Kitty's (Katharine's, I mean,) poor ma——"

"Madam," said the lawyer, "you will oblige me by making haste."

The widow hurried away completely nonplussed. "Miss Kitty; Miss," she called, knocking vigorously at a door at the farther end of the hall; "here's lawyer Blackmar come to see you, and in a dretful strait. I say out on sich men as is always in a hurry."

The door was opened slowly, and a cambric handkerchief, with an inch-deep black border, was lowered from a sweet, childish face. "I can't see him," said a petulant voice.

"Oh, yes you can," said the widow, drawing the lithe, black-robed figure gently from the room and closing the door behind her; "mebbe he's brought you news from your aunt Het."

The widow Beal always used this familiar sobriquet in speaking of Miss Hester Hinkley, of Hinkley Park—probably having formed the erroneous idea that that lady was fat, fair and forty, and just suited to the title. Could Miss Hester have heard her, one

look from those steely-gray eyes would have forever annihilated the presumptuous widow.

“I don’t want to see that disagreeable old lawyer,” said Kitty Kaw; “I won’t go in.”

“Oh, yes, you will, Miss Kitty. Your poor ma would have liked you to.”

“Oh, poor mamma! poor mamma!” sobbed the childish voice. “I hate aunt Hester Hinkley! I don’t care for news from her.”

“Pshaw, now, Miss Kitty, come cheer up! I know you’ll take powerful to your aunt Het. Go in”—pushing her in at the parlor door—“he’s in an awful hurry.” The black-robed figure advanced a few steps, and the cambric handkerchief was again applied to the tearful eyes.

“Hem!” ejaculated lawyer Blackmar—“Miss Kaw?”

“Yes,” replied a choked voice.

“I dare say, Miss Kaw,” (this in an exceedingly brisk and business-like tone) “you are aware that the pension paid annually to the widow of Richard Kaw, for public services, rendered by said Richard Kaw during his lifetime, ran out at her death?”

“Oh, yes, poor mamma! poor mamma!” sobbed the young lady.

“I also presume you are aware that there is nothing left?”

“Yes, yes; oh, dear, poor mamma!”

“And that you are utterly destitute?”

The cambric handkerchief entirely covered the pretty face—Miss Kaw was overcome,

A look, a trifle akin to sympathy, overspread the lawyer's hard visage.

"Miss Kaw," he remarked in a somewhat modulated tone, "allow me to say there have been provisions made. I myself have written to Miss Hester Hinkley, of Hinkley Park, concerning your condition. She has sent for you. I have her letter with me;" and from the left corner of his waistcoat pocket, lawyer Blackmar produced Miss Hester's brief epistle, which he handed, with a stiff bow, to Kitty Kaw. "Miss Kaw, allow me to congratulate you. You will find a safe asylum beneath Miss Hinkley's roof. Most of the young women would have been left to buffet with adversity; but you are among the fortunate of this earth."

Having delivered these closing remarks, in which he considered he had discharged his last obligation, the lawyer replaced his silk hat squarely upon his head, and taking his gold-headed cane between his thumb and first two fingers, prepared to depart.

The cambric handkerchief was lowered an inch or so, disclosing a pair of dewy eyes and an exceedingly pink little *retrousse* nose.

"When am I to go?" inquired Miss Kaw.

"As soon as possible — to-morrow, if you like. A carriage will call for you. and, Miss Kaw, should you need for finances, don't hesitate to draw on me. I will present my bill to Miss Hinkley. Good day."

The door to the widow Beal's respectable boarding house clanged behind him, and Kitty Kaw was alone, standing just where he had left her, in the middle

of the floor, with Miss Hester's affectionate epistle in her hand. Wiping her eyes and the tip of her nose for at least the hundredth time that morning, she proceeded to draw the letter from the envelope and unfold it.

"You may forward the girl immediately."

Down went the letter on the floor, and with an indignant gesture Miss Kitty Kaw stamped one little foot upon it.

"'You may forward the girl immediately'—just as if *I* were a piece of merchandise to be boxed or baled, and sent by express—the mean old thing!" she exclaimed, her black eyes shining with indignation. "She has no more heart than a stone, and I know it! Only think how she treated mamma! Oh, mamma! poor mamma!" and the sobs were renewed again.

"I won't go! I'll work out, first! The idea of her speaking of *me* in that manner. I dare say she quite intends to make a servant of me, just as if *I* had not as good a right at Hinkley Park as she!"

"Well, Miss Kitty?"

The widow Beal had stuck her head in at the door and propounded this question:

"Is it news from your aunt Het?"

"Yes," answered Kitty Kaw, "she has sent for me to come and live with her."

"Wal, now, what did I tell you? I knew your aunt Het would do right by you. I told your poor ma so the day she died. Says I, 'Mrs. Kaw, I know and feel your sister Het will take Kitty and do well

by her. I know she is a hull-souled woman, and don't you fret one bit. Your poor ma did n't seem to reprove as much comfort from it as I thought she might. I'm real glad for you, Miss Kitty, though I shall miss you dretful. Did she write?"

"Yes," replied that young lady, picking up the letter from the floor gingerly with her thumb and first finger, "here it is."

The widow put on her spectacles and examined it minutely. "Short and recise, but straight to the pint, Miss Kitty."

"It's a mean, heartless, unfeeling letter!" said the girl.

"No, it hain't neither, Miss Kitty. I dare say your aunt Het was busy when she writ it, an' hadn't no more time to spend. I like it; it's straight to the pint. I like things straight to the pint. When be you goin'?"

"To-morrow, if I go at all."

"Of course you'll go, Miss Kitty. What on 'arth else can you do? You hain't a cent in the world, and you know you can't export yourself. This is a hard world. It's all I can do to export myself."

"Oh, dear," sobbed Kitty afresh, "poor mamma! poor mamma!"

At precisely nine o'clock the next morning, a carriage stopped at the door of the widow Beal's respectable boarding house, in Norl street, and a young lady, attired entirely in black, with a black-bordered cambric handkerchief pressed close to her eyes, was led out and placed in it by the widow herself, who, after

kissing the childish face affectionately and sending her love to "aunt Het," watched the carriage roll rapidly away.

Kitty Kaw was *en route*.

In one corner of a lonely graveyard the cold April rain was beating down upon a new-made mound. Here, the village beauty, the once pride of Hinkley Park, lay sleeping, while her only daughter, with the same happy peach-colored face and golden locks, had gone to try *her* fate at Hinkley Park.

CHAPTER III.

“A GOOD HATER.”

MISS HESTER HINKLEY, of Hinkley Park, sat in her boudoir — that is, if such an uncompromising apartment could be properly called a boudoir. It was exceedingly unlike the French, scarcely English, but intensely Puritan in all its appointments. Every article wore a rigid look of precision which reminded one instantly of that good old, but somewhat mistaken, orthodox society.

The floor was covered with a dark Axminster carpet, finished with a border of unique design. This border served its own purpose, for ranged in a row exactly upon the edge of it, stood seven stiff, high-backed chairs. The curtains which draped the windows and the high, old-fashioned, post bedstead were of some dark material, and, allowing the expression, hung about as gracefully as a starched gingham gown on a fat woman. In one corner stood a clumsy old Dutch clock, which reached from the floor to the ceiling. This, being an heir-loom, was Miss Hester's special pride, and hence occupied a conspicuous spot in her boudoir. She liked to contemplate that it had stood just so, and measured out life in hours, minutes and seconds to her dead and gone grandfathers. It was a comfort to know that they, like herself, had

watched the hands creep over the dial, and listened to the pendulum's monotonous tick. The old clock was very dear to Miss Hester. In another corner stood a severe-looking hair-cloth sofa, which was also sacred to the memory of the defunct Hinkleys; though how they kept from slipping off this cumbrous piece of furniture is a problem I can never hope to solve. These, with a few other minor articles, completed the furniture of this room, which, need I say, was after Miss Hinkley's own heart; and, as she sat in one of the stiff, high-backed chairs, she looked an antique gem within a fit setting.

Exactly upon the stroke of six she laid down her book—"Baxter's Saint's Rest"—and rang the bell

"John," she commanded, as the old servant appeared in obedience to the summons, "harness the horses to the carriage; drive to the station and inquire if any one alights from the eastern train bearing the name of Katharine Kaw. If there should, you are to bring her here, and if there should not, you are to return quietly home and say nothing about the matter. You understand me?"

The old man bowed respectfully and departed full of wonder. "Weel, weel," he muttered, "I ken not who she be; but if, by the name, she is akin to the bonnie mistress, Rebecca, she'll find old John ha' a gladt weelcome for her."

Miss Hinkley resumed her reading at exactly the sentence she had left off, and continued, apparently deeply absorbed, until the returning carriage wheels grated upon the gravel at the front entrance.

"She's coom, mistress," announced John, "and a bonnie lassie she is—mooch loike the mistress, Rebecca," he added under his breath.

"Very well, John, show her into the library. I will see her presently."

Miss Hinkley proceeded to finish the sentence she was reading. Then rising, she shook out her stiff black bombazine dress (she still clung to mourning, although 'Squire Hinkley had been dead these ten years), pulled the shirred cap a trifle more over her right ear, and taking the book of "Daily Prayer" in her left hand, descended with a slow and measured tread to the library. What she expected to find I am not prepared to say—most likely, though, a mere child; being totally ignorant of her sister's life during the last eighteen or nineteen years; and I will do her the justice to proclaim that a look of real astonishment came into her face as her eyes rested upon Kitty Kaw.

"Rebecca!" she had almost exclaimed; and although there was not a trace of superstition in Miss Hester's make-up, a strange, uncanny feeling took possession of her. She knew perfectly well that Rebecca was dead, but this girl, with her sweet, childish face, was very like her.

It was with an effort that she shook off the feeling and advanced toward the figure that had risen to greet her.

"Katharine Kaw?"

"Aunt Hester Hinkley?"

The tone was as cold and proud as Miss Hester's

own. Willful little Kitty possessed the Hinkley blood so far as to return hauteur for hauteur.

“Be seated,” commanded Miss Hester; “I desire to have a short conversation with you before you retire to your room. We should understand each other at the beginning. I presume you are aware that I sent for you, not because I wanted you, but because you are a Hinkley, and the Hinkleys never disgrace themselves. Your mother came the nearest to it of any——”

“Indeed she did not!” protested Kitty indignantly. “Oh, poor mamma!”—seeking refuge in the black bordered handkerchief.

“I am the best judge of her character and actions,” said Miss Hester, coldly. “I reiterate, she did very foolishly; please not to interrupt. She is dead, I presume?”

Poor Kitty thought of the lonely grave out in the sobbing rain, and a great lump filled her throat, which deprived her of all power to answer.

“Yes,” continued Miss Hester, “she is dead. She received her just deserts in this world, and I do not doubt there is punishment awaiting her in the next.”

The cambric handkerchief came down immediately from the black eyes—Miss Kitty’s tears were suddenly dried. “Are you aware of whom you are speaking?” asked that young lady, bestowing a look of righteous indignation upon her relative.

“Of my misguided sister, Rebecca Hinkley Kaw,”

replied Miss Hester calmly ; “ I think I mentioned her name before.”

“ And my mother,” put in Kitty ; “ my poor, misused, defrauded mother ! who was a thousand times better than all the other Hinkleys put together ; for she at least possessed a heart, which is more than you can say of the rest of them.”

“ That depends,” continued Miss Hester. “ We can trace back as far as my sixteenth grandfather. The Hinkleys have always been a noble race. Not once has there been a stain upon the family escutcheon, until——”

“ Until mamma married papa. I understand you perfectly well, aunt Hester. Richard Kaw was respectable, but poor. You knew nothing of his lineage—it might have been as noble as your own. It was only poverty that made the blot. Under such circumstances I wonder that your doors are not closed against his orphan ? ”

“ You are a Hinkley,” said Miss Hester, not at all discomposed by this vehement outburst ; “ and that makes all the difference in the world.”

“ Indeed ! ” remarked Miss Kitty, sarcastically.

“ I see,” continued the lady, “ that your training has been injudicious. I shall endeavor to correct it. You may retire to your room. Jane will attend you ; ” and striking a bell, Miss Hinkley gave her orders and sailed majestically back to her boudoir.

“ She is like Rebecca,” she remarked to herself as she placed the book of “ Daily Prayer ” in its exact

place upon the shelf, and took down her silk netting — “very much like her. She has her quick, fiery temper, but I shall subdue her,” and Miss Hester’s hand closed upon her delicate work as if it were even poor Kitty Kaw she was so ruthlessly crushing.

Meanwhile that young lady had been shown to her room by the hand-maid, Jane, who evinced as much curiosity as possible with her staring china-blue eyes and gaping mouth. The arrival of a young and beautiful lady at Hinkley Park was not a common event by any means, and had excited the liveliest interest in the lower regions. As yet only old John suspected Kitty’s identity, and he would not speak until his mistress gave him leave.

“Can I do anything, Miss?” asked Jane, with a reluctant hand on the door knob. She would dearly love to stay and solve the mystery.

“Nothing,” replied Miss Kaw. “I prefer to be alone.”

Thus repulsed, Jane was forced to withdraw.

Left alone, Kitty threw herself into an easy chair and looked about her. It was a comfortable room, certainly, with its dark carpet and ponderous old mahogany furniture — rather somber, but just suited to her feelings.

“It will do,” remarked the young lady, “but it reminds me of her — so stiff and cold! How she talked of poor mamma, as if *she* were once to be compared with those stingy, disgusting old Hinkleys! I hate the very name of them! I believe she called *me* a Hinkley. Well, I will show her that I **am one**

—as far as a temper is concerned. If she expects to gain the mastery over me, she'll have to work for it!" and Kitty Kaw's dark eyes sparkled dangerously. "I never was crossed yet," she continued, "and I shall not begin to submit to it, now that I am past seventeen. Papa, nor mamma, never thought of such a thing! Oh, my poor mamma!" and this time the cambric handkerchief did double duty.

"I declare," emerging from behind the said handkerchief after a space of ten minutes or so, "I never in all my life saw such a fright as aunt Hester! What a horrid cap she wears; and that stiff old bombazine dress! As she sat there staring at me like a Gorgon, I could think of nothing else but the rock of Gibraltar dressed up. I don't wonder she isn't married! Who'd ever have her? The way she calls me 'Katherine' makes me shudder. It reminds me—ugh!—of that wicked old Catharine de Medicis, who had all of those people killed. I'm pretty sure she spells it with a 'C.' But what's in a name? A rose, etc., you know. I'm not as ugly as she would imply;" and Kitty took a look at her sweet young face in the mirror. She smiled, then made a comical little *moue* and turned away.

Going to the window, she gazed out upon the lawn. A cold April rain was falling, and everything looked drenched and uncomfortable. Like a white ghost, a mist stole up the avenue and cut off the view beyond. The girl seemed hemmed in by dreariness. "Ah, me!" she sighed, "is it likely that, in this dungeon with aunt Hester to watch me, I shall ever

enjoy myself one atom? I don't doubt but in time I shall become just like *her*—wear shirred caps and bombazine dresses, and go about with a book of Daily Prayer in my left hand. I shall not be Kitty Kaw then, but Miss Katherine Hinkley, of Hinkley Park, and talk all the time about my old dried-up grandfathers, and the like."

"Miss," said Jane, appearing at the door with a tray, "mistress says how I was to serve your tea in your room, and that you was not to come down till she sent for you."

"*Indeed!* Well, pray tell your mistress for me that I shall 'come down,' or stay up, just as I see fit," said Miss Kitty flippantly; "but on this occasion I will take my tea here. In fact, I shall rather enjoy it. You may set the tray down and go, Jane."

"But, Miss," said Jane, reluctantly—

"What is it, my good girl?"

"You surely hain't expectin' me to tell the mistress what you jest said?"

"And why not? I presume to say that my feet are my own, and should they incline to carry me out of this room, I shall not consult Miss Hester Hinkley, or any one else. Nobody ever told *me* before, that I was or was not to remain in my room, and they are not to begin now."

"Lawk o' mercy!" muttered Jane, as she closed the door and retreated. "She's one on 'em! Won't she and the mistress pull hair!"

"To think," said Kitty, drawing the tray towards her and helping herself to the eatables thereon, "that

she should send *me* word not to leave this room until I am sent for ! Who knows whether or not that will be in six weeks ? She may forget my very existence. I'll show her how I intend to obey her ! If I were not just tired to death, I would go down this very evening. I dare say, every time I do anything to displease her majesty, she intends to make a prisoner of me in this room. We shall see ! ”

Ah, yes, Miss Kitty, “ we shall *see* ! ” Perhaps you are not aware that the mandates of the mistress of Hinkley Park are as invincible as the laws of the Medes and the Persians.

After the tempting little meal had been disposed of, Kitty Kaw brushed out all her soft golden curls, laid aside her black robes, and donning “ the prettiest night-gown under the sun,” knelt down and said her prayers ; then climbing into the old-fashioned, high-post bedstead, and cried herself to sleep over “ poor mamma. ”

CHAPTER IV.

GREEK MEETS GREEK.

The weakest goes to the wall.

—*Shakespeare.*

KITTY KAW had slept well — slept soundly — in spite of the somber old room ; in spite of Miss Hinkley's cold reception ; in spite of the lurking fear that the old house was haunted by the sixteen defunct grandfathers who might rise before her, *en masse*, at any moment.

She rubbed her eyes, pushed back her tangled golden curls, and concluded it was time to get up.

Opening a window, the soft Spring air came rushing in. Every trace of yesterday's storm had vanished, and Hinkley Park was looking *en regalia*.

"It's pleasant," said that young lady, "and I shall go down and take a stroll through the park. The idea of aunt fossil intending to immure me in this room ! I might as well be a mummy outright, and be kept in a glass case. That suggests — I wonder that the sixteen grandfathers are not embalmed and set up for ornaments in the drawing-room. It would be a pleasant conclave, surely. Supposing I should happen to have a lover—a bashful young man for instance—I could entertain him nicely by saying : these are my grandfathers ; that is Alexander Hinkley, and this is Hezekiah Hinkley ; and so on down, eulogiz-

ing upon the particular merits of each one ; then I would wind up with this interesting information : that when I am dead, I expect to be added immediately to the list. I know what he would say," and Kitty Kaw shook her long curls, while the dimples chased one another all over the peach-colored face — "Miss Kitty, let me be a mummy, too."

"Oh, dear!" she exclaimed suddenly, drawing down her face—"poor mamma! poor mamma!—where's my handkerchief?—oh, *poor* mamma!" and then followed a deluge that threatened to drown every smile of the morning. "I wish," said that young lady, after wiping away the last tear, "I wish I knew where the cat slept ; I'd go down and walk under her window and sing with all my might, just to plague her and let her know *how* I intend to stay in my room."

"I believe I will go—yes, I'm going now. Ah, Miss Hester Hinkley—beware! I'm coming—beware!"

Down the wide oaken staircase tripped Miss Kitty Kaw and out through the great front entrance upon the lawn.

Soon she was sauntering up and down the gravelled walk, singing at the top of her fresh young voice :

"Who'll buy caller herrin' ?
They're bonnie fish and halesome farin' ;
Buy my caller herrin'."

Now, paramount, among the rules so firmly established at Hinkley Park, was this : Miss Hester was

on no account to be disturbed from her balmy slumber before the stroke of eight. At that precise instant, however, she was to be awakened by the ringing of a bell at the key-hole of her door ; and, though long-accustomed habit had rendered this act a superfluity (Miss Hinkley always awoke of her own accord), it was in no wise to be omitted. No, indeed ! Such an oversight would have immediately caused the phials of Miss Hester's wrath to uncork ; then, woe betide the unfortunate's head.

Alas ! this morning, the clock had not gained the stroke of seven, when Miss Kaw's inopportune voice began to make itself heard exactly under Miss Hester's window. That young lady was not supposed to know the exact time allotted to the mistress of Hinkley Park to slumber ; she only knew that the fresh air was very invigorating, and at that particular moment she was feeling unusually well and uncommonly like exercising her lungs. Therefore, she was not prepared for the appearance of Jane, who slid cautiously around one corner of the house and whispered in a tone of entreaty :

“ Oh, hush, Miss ! ”

“ What for ? ” inquired Kitty, manifesting great surprise.

“ You'll wake the mistress. ”

“ Is that all ? ” said the young lady, composedly. “ Well, I'm sorry if she *will* take the trouble to awake at my singing, but I can not possibly desist. I feel just like singing, and my voice is my own, I presume ? Go in, Jane ; you mean well, I dare say,

but I am not used to having people dictate to me. I have lived seventeen years, and nobody ever told me before when I should, or should not, sing; and I don't intend they shall begin now. Go in, like a good girl, and leave me in peace. It's high time your mistress was aroused. Over much sleep is good for neither man nor beast."

Jane retired with horror depicted on her countenance. "I can't stop her no way," she exclaimed to the cook; "she's just determined to raise bedlum and bring the mistress down on the hull of us."

Meanwhile Kitty had resumed her walk and song, pitching the latter on a decidedly higher key.

Presently a window slid slowly up and a night-capped head appeared. "Katherine Kaw," called a metallic voice, "go instantly to your room."

The tone was so determined that Kitty quailed in spite of herself.

"The man, or woman, who hesitates is lost," thought that damsel, recovering herself. "If I succumb now all will be over, and I shall be *surely* in the cat's clutches."

Turning, she smiled up the hard face in the window. "Good morning, aunt Hester," rang out the clear voice; "you had better come down—the air is lovely."

"Katherine Kaw, go *instantly* to your room." There was no softening of intonation—evidently Miss Hester was not to be moved by any such blandishments.

"Please excuse me, aunt Hester," said Kitty; "I

don't enjoy staying in my room on such a beautiful morning ; anything else to oblige you, though."

"Do you deliberately intend to disobey me, Katherine Kaw?"

"Not exactly that, auntie ; only, you see, I prefer the morning air, and a walk in the park, to a snuffy, old-fashioned room. *Bon jour.*"

The window went down with as near a bang as Miss Hester ever permitted herself to indulge in. Ringing the little bell upon her toilet table, she summoned the awe-stricken Jane, who, from a convenient angle, had made herself cognizant of all later proceedings. "Jane," she commanded, "go to Miss Kaw's room ; take the key from the door and bring it to me."

Jane obeyed, and Miss Hinkley closed the door of her apartment with the following injunction : "The instant Miss Kaw retires to her room you are to let me know."

Drawing the shutters, she disappeared behind the bed-hangings and was soon snoring as peacefully as if there were no such beings under the sun as refractory nieces.

Having come off conqueror, Kitty concluded to abandon her walk immediately under the enemy's window, and take the projected stroll through the park. "The idea," she soliloquised, "of *her* sending *me* to my room ! I imagine, Miss Hester Hinkley, I shall be able to disabuse you of the very erroneous impression you have formed, as to being able to

rule over me. It is an exceeding preposterous idea, and the sooner you are rid of it the better."

Presently she beheld through a leafy vista a sheet of sparkling water. "The lake!" she exclaimed in delight. "Oh, how beautiful it is! How often I have heard poor mamma speak of it! It must have been down this very path that she used to steal at evening, to meet papa. What a pretty name it bears — 'Mermaid Lake.' Papa used to call mamma 'his little Undine.' I imagine she looked like a beautiful water-fairy, in her long white robe, with her golden hair floating about her. How dearly they loved each other, and how delightful it all was until aunt Hester came spying upon them, and told grandpa Hinkley! Of course the old curmudgeon raised a dreadful fuss (he had outgrown every thought of love ages before, I dare say), and papa and mamma were secretly married and came away to a stuffy little room in town. I declare, it is dowdy to be married! I'd much rather have been 'Undine' all the days of my life, and dwelt by this beautiful lake. O mamma! how sadly they misused you! O my poor mamma!" and down sat Kitty Kaw upon the grass, to indulge in a few tears.

"If I only had a boat," she remarked, when the fountain had been exhausted and she was herself once more, "I would row over to that little island. If there were only a cave over there, all of coral, and I were a mermaid fair!" and she fell to singing, in a soft voice,

“ Oh, who would not be
A mermaid fair,
Singing alone,
Combing her hair
Under the sea,
In a golden curl,
With a comb of pearl,
On a throne ?

“ I ’m hungry,” was the next practical announcement — “ nearly starved. I shall go back to the house and get my breakfast, then return and spend the day here. It will be delightful away from the *cat* ! ”

Full of these thoughts, the young lady sauntered leisurely back to the house and up the broad staircase to her own room, for the purpose of re-arranging her golden locks.

Alas ! she had no sooner entered this apartment than the wily Jane whispered at the keyhole of Miss Hester’s door, “ She ’s come, mistress.”

It happened to be at the exact stroke of eight, and Miss Hester was wide awake. She arose quickly and with a cat-like tread stole down the corridor to her niece’s room. It was but the work of an instant to insert the key in the lock ; one turn, and presto ! Miss Kitty Kaw was a prisoner.

The greatest battles on record have been won by strategy. The greatest generals have been the most skillful strategists. Miss Hester had proved *herself* a competent general, and had at the very outset outwitted Kitty Kaw.

The sharp click of the turning lock attracted that

young lady's attention, and she was not long in learning the true state of affairs.

Locked in her room, rage, indignation and despair took possession of her. What should she do ; batter the door down ? Hardly. Climb out of the window ? It was too high from the ground. Apologize to aunt Hester ? No ; a thousand times, no ! She would remain in this room a whole lifetime rather than so humble herself.

In fancy she drew a harrowing picture of herself, like unto Lady Jane Grey confined in the Tower at London, subject to the haughty queen's displeasure.

"I presume aunt Hester would off with my head if she only dared," quoth Kitty. "I fancy she is like that dreadful iron Mary. Oh, what *shall* I do ! How am I to get out ? Poor mamma ! oh, poor mamma !" and in the light of this new trial Kitty sobbed as if her heart would break.

"Well, there is one thing," she continued, wiping her tears away ; "if I am to be a martyr, I am determined to die the death of one — brave to the very last. How I wish I had a copy of Fox's Book of Martyrs, so I could learn just how *they* conducted themselves. I really don't suppose aunt Hester keeps thumbscrews or a rack in the house ; so I shall not be subjected to torture. I know what she intends to do, however, and it is just as bad — starve me ; yes, literally starve me, until my cheeks fall in and my very hair drops off my head. Just imagine me with awful and black hollows under my eyes, great pointed cheek bones, my mouth drawn down in a pucker, and

not a hair left on my head! Oh, Kitty! Kitty! surely no one will be saying then that 'your pretty face is pictured in his heart.' I declare it is a shame to reduce me to such a state; it is, indeed? I wonder what she intends to do with me then? I know what I can do. By that time I shall be able to make my egress through the keyhole. I mean to play up ghost, and roam about the house at night, scaring everybody out of their wits — aunt Hester included. I can easily slip back before morning, so no one will mistrust me. Ah, me! how I wish that about day after to-morrow — by the time I have gained an interesting pallor — some Romeo would happen along under this window, with a rope ladder, and whisper 'Juliet!' Would n't I descend? Then I would say, 'Here, my good fellow, is a sixpence for your trouble; now go to! go to!'

"Dear me, I am almost famished! I shall soon be obliged to gnaw the furniture. I shall begin upon the pin-cushion, as that is stuffed with saw-dust. Not much nutriment in saw-dust, I imagine. I do wonder how long I shall be able to subsist upon it. I observe with joy that the pin-cushion is a large one.

'Hark! a footstep comes this way. Can it be she intends to let me out?' and Kitty Kaw's visage suddenly brightened.

"Your breakfast, Miss," said Jane, opening the door far enough to admit a tray, "an' the mistress says as how you can't come out 'till you make proper 'pologies an' promise to obey her in the future."

"Tell your mistress, then, Jane, that I shall live

and die in the seclusion of this apartment. I hope she will not be so cruel as to extend her enmity to my corpse ; but, if she should, she can construct a funeral pyre in the center of the room and cremate me. Just suggest it to her, Jane, my good girl."

"La ! how you do go on, Miss. It hain't no airthly use to stan' out so agin' the mistress ; she's so sot in her ways, no one can go agin' her."

"Then behold that individual, Jane !" exclaimed Miss Kaw, striking a tragic attitude. "I am determined to defy Miss Hinkley with my latest breath. Go to ! I say, and carry my message to her highness. Say to her that the blood of my sixteen grandfathers—I should say seventeen, counting the late 'Squire Hinkley—courses through my veins, and that the motto of our ancient house is written upon my heart : 'We conquer, or we die !'"

"Good gracious, Miss !" said Jane, looking her astonishment, "how queer you be ! I'll tell her all I mind of, but I couldn't go through that hull lingo to save my soul. I hope you will eat your breakfast. Good morning."

The key grated in the lock, and Jane hastened to deliver the following condensed message :

"She took on, mistress, awful wild like, an' said she'd be a corpse fust before she'd 'pologize. A curious creetur as ever I see."

"I shall subdue her," said Miss Hester with a grim smile.

"*Jacta est alea !*" (I have pronounced my own doom) exclaimed Kitty Kaw, turning her back upon

the door. "I must die in this room. I wonder what aunt Hester will say to my message! What a charming idea, Kitty, my child, about the motto of our house being written upon your heart; only, I fear it was not a very original idea. Let me see, it was Iron Mary who said they would find Calais written upon her heart. Well, the saying served me a good turn. Shall I eat (eyeing the tray) or hasten my certain death by slow starvation? The broiled chicken looks inviting. I will eat this once, only once," and in spite of her hard fate, Miss Kaw drew the tray towards her and made a comfortable breakfast.

Greek had certainly met Greek, Miss Hester found. Three days had passed slowly by and there was, as yet, no signs of capitulation on the part of her obdurate niece.

"I can stand it as long as *she*," remarked Miss Hester, which was wonderful, considering that lady had her usual liberty and was in no way sympathetically inclined toward her tender young relative.

To that young lady, however, it was growing monotonous, very monotonous; so much so, that it was fast becoming unbearable. She grew morose and cried most of the time over "poor mamma," and was fast attaining that distinguished pallor she had so dwelt upon. At last she began to wish she had apologized. "It would not have hurt me," quoth Miss Kitty; "mere words are as nothing, and I really would do almost anything to get out of this detestable room."

The fourth day drew to a close and Miss Kaw suc-

cumbed. "Tell Miss Hinkley I wish to speak with her, Jane," she said meekly.

Miss Hester came, grim and warlike.

Kitty Kaw threw back her golden curls, her soft cheeks all aglow, and stood like a culprit before her judge.

"You wished to communicate with me," said the general, scenting triumph in the air.

"Yes," said Kitty humbly, "I don't wish to stay in any longer. I'm very sorry I left my room without your consent."

"Very well," commented the general; "and I presume in the future you will remember that *I* am the mistress of Hinkley Park, and therefore accustomed to being obeyed?"

"Yes, ma'am," faltered the culprit.

"Then Katherine, you are at liberty to leave your room;" and with a high and mighty air Miss Hester sailed out of the apartment. She had won the day.

"She'll not do it again," muttered Kitty, as she watched the retreating figure; "I'll always carry the key with me, after this. Aunt Hester Hinkley, you have not conquered *me* yet."

CHAPTER V.

BLUE BLOOD IN AMERICA.

“Fair tresses man’s imperial race ensnare,
And beauty draws us by a single hair.”

TO LORD MASON GRANTLY, OF GRANTLY MANOR, ENGLAND—

DEAR OLD BOY : I promised to write you as soon as I were once landed and fairly settled. Here goes :

At our parting I noted in my memorandum sundry important questions to be answered in this, my first epistle, viz. : “Upon what spot of this uncivilized continent have I stayed my youthful feet ? Is the scenery picturesque ? Are the people out-and-out barbarians ? If so, what species of wild beast do they most closely resemble ? And last, but not least, do the wilds of America afford the rare sight of a pretty girl ?”

Everything must have a beginning, my boy, so I will begin by saying that we were mistaken in our ideas of America. It is highly civilized. The people eat, drink and sleep here exactly as they do in Old England. They have all of our follies and most of our virtues ; all of our modern improvements and many of their own added. In fact they are a set of ingenious Yankees, whom it is hard to beat. The bloated aristocrat here is the moneyed man. He may have blacked boots, dug out stables, or run errands all his boyhood days. Nobody thinks of that. The popular cry in America is, “Let me feel of your pockets.” They don’t give a rap for blue blood unless it is cashed. But on the whole they are a good set — warm-hearted, hospitable, etc.—and the only species of beast that they most closely resemble is Johnny Bull.

“Where have I stayed my youthful feet ?” At present I find myself comfortably quartered in a lazy, fallen-asleep little village ensconced among the hills in southern New Hampshire. It is a very old place—among the first settlements, and its narrow

street and queer, antique-looking houses remind me immensely of a little obscure stadt in Germany, which I once visited and fell deeply in love with, and where I grew so lazy and fat—so fond of life and do-nothing in general, that I was in danger of becoming a mummy and burying myself forever. To tell the truth I can hardly convince myself that I am in go-ahead America.

“The scenery?” I wish I had a thousand tongues to sing its praises! My feeble pen can do it but poor justice. I can only say, come and see for yourself; come and visit these grand old hills; come and watch the sun gild their crags and peaks in the early morning, and the purple shadows linger over them at evening. Take a sail on the fairy lake which lies cradled between two of these giants. I know there are naiads in this lake. I expect some day to come upon a group of them, and choose me a wife. I will paint you her picture to hang up among your dead and gone ancestors, in the old hall. Her’s shall be a face to shame your high-born beauties. She shall wear a robe like the foam on the sea, and a crown of water-lilies—this queen of mine! and her smile shall be so sweet as to lure you to forget she is but mortal, and go envying me.

Excuse my day-dream, old boy. Grecian mythology is awfully out of place in this practical nineteenth century, and according to historical evidence, the water-nymphs are all dead long ago, and so is romance. I can not describe the scenery, but when I land in Old England you shall see that my brush has not been idle. I will bring it back to you on yards of canvas.

One thing more and I close—the pretty girls. I hardly think they will interest you—you who move in the *creme de la creme* of English society; you who are hand in glove with my Lady Isabel, my Lady Cecilia, etc., etc.—what do you care for these simple country lasses, away out here in barbarous America?—girls who have not a shred of nobility to tack an air to; whose ancestors have been butchers and bakers and candlestick-makers? so I will pass them lightly over, with one exception—Kitty Kaw.

You have watched the great shining stars at evening, old fellow? Well, they remind me of Kitty Kaw. Her eyes are like the stars. Pluck from the rosebush near the fountain in your stately garden the purest, whitest rose; then go down the terrace.

At the left are the blush roses ; put the two together, and you have Kitty Kaw's complexion. Find the richest gold and spin it as fine as silk, and you have her hair. Gaze upon the chiseled features of a Psyche, the exquisite form of a Diana, and last but not least, borrow the very smile of an angel, and you have Kitty Kaw.

“ Who is she ? ”

The niece of Miss Hester Hinkley—the one blue-blooded aristocrat of Briartown. The Hinkleys are a very old family, and have been here ever since the country was first settled. It is said that Miss Hester, the present mistress of Hinkley Park, traces back to her sixteenth great-grandfather, who was a baron of high order. The Hinkley mansion, which is built mostly after the English style of architecture, is a fine old pile, and to my way of thinking looks out of place this side of the water. However, it serves a purpose, and affords employment to a host of strolling artists. I think, on an average, there are about five hundred sketches of it made annually. I myself shall embrace the opportunity,

Speaking of strolling artists, thereby hangs a tail. Miss Kitty Kaw owes her plebeian name to one of these vagabonds whom her mother, Rebecca Hinkley, was foolish enough to fall in love with and marry. This exceedingly foolish act met with the usual reward. Mrs. Rebecca was disinherited by her enraged parent, and the property descended entire to Hester, who, if report says true, is too ugly to once dream of falling in love.

Miss Kaw was adopted by her aunt, upon her mother's death, which occurred but a short time ago. The gossips say the old dragon keeps a sharp eye out for all strolling artists, lest the young lady in question should possess her mother's inclinations.

My dear boy, enough is enough. I hear the warning dinner-bell, and my landlady, Mrs. Betsey Snibbs, is a punctual person, exceedingly fond of good cheer, given to gossip, and quite devoted to your humble servant. I may as well mention here that I have never seen Miss Kitty Kaw, and that the description I have been able to give to you of her, dropped from the voluble tongue of Mrs. Betsey, not in quite these words, but very similar. The effect is the same.

There goes that confounded bell again ! I must close. *Adieu*, old boy, till next time. Your affectionate cousin,

RALPH OTIS.

P. S.—Don't fall in love with Kitty Kaw.

My Lord Mason Grantly had just broken the seal to this letter. He was in the breakfast-room at Grantly Manor, which, by the way, was as comfortable an apartment as one would wish to see—with its rich crimson-velvet hangings, its cheerful paintings of fruit and game, and its massive side-board loaded down with rare old plate which had been in the Grantly family for years.

The table was laid, and at it sat Lord Mason, a young man of twenty-seven, or thereabouts, the present owner of Grantly Manor. It was a noticeable fact that my lord bore very little resemblance to his noble race. By the most of people, however, he was considered the gainer, as the former heirs had been rather weak-looking men, very far removed from beauty. They had possessed the Saxon hair and eyes, while my lord's were as black as a raven's wing. Theirs were stolid English faces, while my lord's had all the fire and concentrated force of the Spaniard.

“It was strange,” argued those who adhered to the old saying, “Like father, like son.” However, there was no denying but my lord was the legitimate offspring of the late Sir Sidney Grantly, and if he differed from his ancestors in the point of resemblance, he at least possessed their strongest characteristic—an inflexible will.

“Malcolm,” he said, addressing a white-aproned functionary who stood near, waiting the summons to serve breakfast, “has my mother come down?”

“She will be here presently, my lord.”

“Very well;” and the young peer resumed his letter. “What a poetical fellow Ralph is,” he laughed to himself. “It was just so when we were classmates at Eton; always in a day-dream. ‘The naiads’ ha, ha! that is the old boy to a dot. He can not see the practical side of existence; everything with him is *couleur de rose*. Well, I envy him. There must be a charm to such a nomadic life as he leads—wedded to his brush. I wish I were out in America with him—away from this confounded bore, society. I should enjoy a rest from it, however short.”

“‘Pretty girls’—ah, yes, I believe I did mention them, very naturally, and here he goes on ‘one,’ only one—‘Kitty Kaw.’ Suggestive of crows. ‘Watch the stars—pluck roses—spin gold-chisel features—borrow the very smile of an angel’—that’s poetical, and it is the make-up of Kitty Kaw. You’ve got her down fine, old fellow.”

“Who is she?—the niece of a veritable old Hecate, who watches over the innocent maiden and makes life a perpetual burden to her; pleasant, I must say.”

“‘Hinkley’—that name sounds familiar—‘an old family’—perhaps akin to the Hinkleys of Devonshire. No telling; there are so many loppings off from the genealogical tree that it is hard keeping track of one’s relations. Be it as it may, Miss Kitty

Kaw, from all description, is as lovely as a houri. How I should——; confound it all!—I say confound it! What does the fellow mean?—says he's never seen her. Mrs. Betsy Snibb's description, indeed!—I dare say she is as unlike what he pictures her as a crow is unlike a bird of paradise. The d——l take the fellow!—he is always raising my expectations only to damp them!” and my Lord Mason threw down the letter with a well-assumed air of disgust.

“I wonder mother doesn't come. Does she intend to starve a fellow?” he commented impatiently. “Malcolm, go——”

The velvet curtains to an archway at the left were swept aside at this moment, and a tall woman of some forty summers entered the room.

My Lady Eleanore Grantly, present mistress of Grantly Manor, and wife of the late Lord Sidney Grantly, was a blonde and had in her day been called a beauty. But that day had long gone by, and now my lady was very sallow, very fretful, and very much of a drab. Not that she knew it—oh, no; in her own estimation each succeeding year only added new luster to the once famed beauty; and her assumed youthful manners and ways of dressing were at times a trifle ridiculous in all eyes save her own.

This morning she was clad in a purple breakfast robe, elaborately embroidered and confined at the waist by a silken cord and tassel; her sallow face was touched with rouge, and her blonde hair hung in innumerable little ringlets about her head. This careful toilet, however, failed to conceal the traces of last

night's dissipation ; and withal, my lady was looking poorly. As she took her seat at the table, two ugly little wrinkles were perceptibly marked in her forehead—something had evidently gone wrong.

“Good morning, *ma mere*,” said Lord Mason, languidly lifting his black eyebrows. “What ! in the sullens ? Surely Jeannette has committed the unpardonable sin this time.”

“Jeannette has nothing whatever to do with it,” snapped the lady ; “it is you, yourself, Mason.”

“*I, ma mere !* Under the name of Heaven, what offense have I committed ?”

The Lady Eleanore frowned and cast a warning glance toward the servant.

“You are dismissed, Malcolm ; if we require anything I will ring,” said my lord with a wave of his hand ; “and now, *ma mere*,” as the door closed, “unburden yourself. I await my doom.”

“How can you be so frivolous, Mason,” snapped Lady Grantly. “What I wish to speak of is your conduct toward the Lady Cecilia. It is really execrable ! Pray tell me what you mean by such gross neglect ?”

“Mean, my dear mother !—I mean nothing at all.”

“Then it is high time you did, my lord ; she will not endure your neglect much longer, I can assure you.”

“I had no idea, *ma mere*, that Lady Cecilia had any feeling about the matter. Why should she ? What can ‘*my neglect*,’ as you term it, be to her ?”

“It is everything to her, Mason. Can you not see that she worships the very ground you tread upon? Does she not consult your taste in all things, and is she not continually endeavoring to please you? You may be blind to all this, my son, but you surely can not be blind to my dearest wish—nay, my command, that you shall make her the mistress of Grantly Manor.”

“My dear mother, is not that putting it rather strong? How are you aware that, were I willing, the Lady Cecilia would consent to such an arrangement?”

“I know she loves you, Mason, and that it is for your eternal good to marry her. Oh, my child, do not refuse me this wish! She is good, dutiful and rich; what more can you ask?”

“Confound it!—mother, I don’t wish to marry the Lady Cecilia. She may be a good little thing, I admit, but altogether too wishy-washy to suit my taste in a wife. I tell you I won’t marry her.”

“Then, I tell you”—Lady Eleanore had risen, pale and trembling—“I tell you, Lord Mason Grantly, that unless you wed the Lady Cecilia, you are liable to become a beggar at any moment!”

“Mother! are you insane?”

“I am no more insane than you; I am in earnest. Refuse to marry Lady Cecilia, and, I repeat, you are liable to become a beggar at any moment; wed her, and all will be well.”

“Mother, explain yourself.”

“I will not; not another syllable shall you learn

from my lips. I have spoken ; take your choice ; ” and Lady Eleanore sank back in her seat, cold and silent.

Lord Mason arose from the table and pushed his chair impatiently aside.

“ Have you heard from Ralph lately ? ” inquired Lady Eleanore, anxious to change the subject.

“ Yes ; I received a letter from him this morning. ”

“ Is he well ? ”

“ Quite well, and enjoying himself hugely, which latter is more than I can say, ” muttered Lord Mason, savagely.

“ Are you away, my son ? ”

“ To the stables. I shall ride to Bradleigh this morning, and look over those papers with Martins. *Au revoir* ; ” and my lord made his way out into the wide hall, where the walls were thickly hung with rusty suits of armor and portraits of the dead and gone Grantlys.

He paused before the face of the late Lord Sidney, and contemplated it for some moments in silence.

“ We are indeed very unlike, ” he said at last. “ I wonder that with all these broad acres I inherited none of his looks ; but I suppose I should count myself a lucky dog, for the Grantlys were not famed for their good looks. Confound it ! what could mother have meant by that assertion ? How can my not marrying Lady Cecilia Brandon make me a beggar ? The estate is very little incumbered, and my income aside from it a matter of three thousand a year. A man

must be the veriest profligate to squander more than that. I sometimes fancy mother's mind is failing her — a mild sort of lunacy, which cropped out in this unexpected manner. However, if it would please her so much, I might marry the Lady Cecilia. She is n't exactly my style, but she comes from a good old family, and the Brandon and Grantly estates, united, would do a man proud.

“‘Watch the great shining stars; they are like her eyes;’ not quite that. The Lady Cecilia's eyes are as far removed from stars as possible. They are a sort of colorless pea-green, with no more sparkle to them than a Chinese lantern. All that sort of thing belongs to Kitty Kaw, Ralph's divinity; or properly speaking, to the picture of his imagination. No, my dear boy, Lady Cecilia is of this earth, as they make 'em, while your divinity belongs to the world of rose-colored fables.”

Thus soliloquising, Lord Mason made his way to the stables, and mounting his jet-black steed, was soon galloping away through the pleasant morning air towards Bradleigh.

Lady Eleanore Grantly watched him depart, from behind the silken curtains of her boudoir window. “I have warned him,” she murmured, “and he will heed me. Oh, my boy, if I can only save you and keep my secret, I shall be more than satisfied.” She turned away as the rider disappeared through the iron gates, and rang for her maid. “Jeannette,” she commanded, “lay out the maize-colored silk and my

amethysts ; I shall dress for a drive, and — Stay ! tell John to cull the choicest flowers the conservatory affords, and arrange them into a bouquet.

“I shall make it all right,” she said to herself. “The little simpleton will be pleased with the flowers — doubly so when I tell her Mason sent them, as I certainly shall. If he will not work for himself, his mother must, for him.”

With this sage conclusion my Lady Eleanore placed herself under the hands of the ingenious Jeanette, and at the end of an hour emerged resplendent in the maize-colored silk, with a necklace of glittering amethysts encircling her sallow throat.

A suggestion that the color of her robe was exceedingly like that of her complexion would have filled my lady with horror ; and it was well that the remark of her maid passed unheard : “She’s just like a full-blown daffodil !”

Blissfully unconscious and thinking herself looking extremely youthful and piquant, Lady Grantly entered her carriage and was driven rapidly towards Brandon Park, where she hoped with skillful maneuvers to effectually propitiate Lady Cecilia, and again secure favor for her son.

CHAPTER VI.

A SKELETON IN THE SAFE.

“Oh, what a tangled web we weave,
When first we practice to deceive.”

WHILE the Lady Eleanore is on her way to Brandon Park, her son, Lord Mason, was seated in a dingy little law office at Bradleigh, overlooking a pile of musty deeds.

“How about that law-suit, Martins?” he asked, presently, lifting his eyes from the paper he is examining, and letting them fall upon the lawyer sitting opposite, busily writing.

Martins put his pen behind his ear, brushed up his hair in front, nervously, with one hand—a peculiarity the lawyer’s own—and replied, slowly:

“Well, my lord, it is not decided yet, nor like to be. They can not find their missing man, nor bring forward any satisfactory evidence of his death.”

“I understand—the estate can not be settled until he is found or his death proven?”

“Exactly, my lord; until the missing link is supplied they will be forced to suspend all judgment.”

“It is very strange that Richard Grandale could have dropped out of existence so completely that not the slightest trace of him can be found.”

“Strange—but true, my lord. The best detect-

ives here, and on the continent, have made every effort to find him, but to no purpose."

"He may have gone to America."

"So *they* thought, my lord, and have searched there also. It is a large sum of money to throw over for the sake of one man, but it will have to be done. The will reads: 'Unless Richard Grandale be found, or absolute proof of his death given within two years of the prescribed time, the estate is to be sold and the valuation thereof to be devoted to charitable purposes.' It is in plain black and white—there is no dodging it;" and lawyer Martins removed the pen from behind his ear and resumed his copying.

Lord Mason put aside his papers and drew out an elegant gold repeater.

"Jupiter!" he exclaimed; "here it is past twelve, and I was to meet Grimby at precisely that hour. I must make haste. I will call again to-morrow, Martins, and we will proceed in our examination."

The lawyer bowed his head in token of assent, without taking the trouble to glance up from his work.

The door of the musty, dusty office closed behind my lord, and he sauntered down the passage humming a fragment of the latest opera.

He had scarcely gotten out of hearing, when the lawyer closed his book and getting down from his stool crept cautiously to the door and secured it. "Ah-ha, my lord!" he chuckled, while a peculiar look—half malice and half cunning—overspread his sallow face; "you comment upon the strangeness of

this world. Well, it is strange ; half of you grand people stand over loaded mines, where the least pull on the right wire would blow you into ten thousand fragments. We lawyers keep your secrets for you at the price of a beggarly fee and a civil nod of your head in passing. I wonder what your lordship would say to *this* ? ” and he opened a metallic safe and drew forth a yellow document which he spread out upon the table and examined with great interest.

“ I presume you are not aware that one little word from *me* could oust you, my lord, completely oust you from your soft nest ?—but there is no fear of me ” (refolding the paper); “ I am well paid to keep the secret. You are a fine fellow and may as well have the estate as the next. Then, you patronize me ; perhaps, if things were changed, the new owner might look completely over my head—though he should bear me a good turn for feathering his nest so comfortably. No, you are safe, my lord ; but I shall raise my price a little—say a thousand pounds. The Lady Eleanore will pay. I believe she would sacrifice her last shilling to keep this secret. Yes, it is well worth a thousand pounds more. I will speak to her about it at my earliest opportunity ; ” and with a satisfied grin, lawyer Martins relocked the paper in the metallic safe, and taking up the “ Morning Post ” was soon lost in the depths of a long-winded parliamentary debate.

In the elegant drawing-room at Brandon Park, with its violet silk hangings, its carpet of white velvet, its furniture upholstered in white and violet, sat

Lady Eleanore Grantly, awaiting the appearance of Lady Cecilia.

Even my lady's critical taste could find no fault with this charmingly arranged apartment, as her pleased eyes wandered over its appointments.

"It is grander than Grantly Manor," she mentally commented; "and it all belongs to a puny girl who loves my son. It is well. I wonder"—glancing impatiently at a little ormolu clock upon the parian marble mantel—"that she does not come; it is already past twelve."

At this very moment a door opened and the object of her cogitations entered the room.

Lady Cecilia Brandon was the heiress of Brandon Park—a vast estate which stretched away for miles to join that of Grantly Manor. With all this in her favor, not the most lenient of critics could have pronounced her anything but plain. Her's was a drab little face, unquestionably marred by small eyes, a pug nose and a wide mouth. These defects, however, might have been partially redeemed had she possessed one spark of animation; but alas! a feeble lifting of the eyebrows and a sickly smile was all Lady Cecilia ever affected.

This morning she was dressed in a pure white muslin robe, handsomely embroidered and trimmed with rare old lace; so if not exactly an inviting sight, she was far from being a disagreeable one. The little lady had evidently passed a bad night, for her eyelids were red and swollen, and her dumpy little nose had a very suspicious tint. The dull eyes brightened,

however, as they rested upon Lady Grantly. "Oh, it is you?" she exclaimed, in a tone of relief. "Hetty did not tell me, and I was so afraid it was that prinky Ellen Parker, or some other awful, disagreeable old thing!"

"Then I infer that I am neither disagreeable nor old in your eyes, *ma chere*, but a welcome visitor," said the lady, rising and kissing the pale little face affectionately. "However, I should not have ventured out so early this morning, but for Mason, who was *so* anxious to learn your health. See what beautiful flowers he has sent you, *petite*. He picked and arranged them, every one, himself. The silly boy did not wish me to tell you of this, for fear you would thank him. I really never saw any one so averse to being thanked as Mason is. He never wishes one—even distantly—to refer to his gifts; so don't mention this for the world, *chere*, as the poor child would never be able to pluck up the courage to send you more. You are blushing, *petite*. I almost believe you do care something for my boy, who loves *you* to distraction. Don't for an instant mind his little neglect of last evening; it arose from pure jealousy, on account of Sir Hantley. You danced with him once too often, *ma petite*, and the poor boy went nearly wild."

"I'm sure he danced the whole evening with that horrid Genevieve Vintly," pouted Lady Cecilia.

"I dare say, *petite*, that's a man's way. When they are jealous, they always manifest it by flying off to some other woman; but Lord Mason really pay-

ing attention to Genevieve Vintly is too preposterous ! Indeed, to my certain knowledge, he considers her a gawky, ill-bred creature, and as plain as a pipe-stem. He declares that you and she are as nearly alike as a white rose and a daffodil." (Lady Grantly forgot to add that the daffodil represented Lady Cecilia.)

"Did he say that?" asked the little lady. "Oh, tell me, dear Lady Grantly, did he really compare *me* to a white rose?"

"Yes, *ma petite*, he really did — to a delicate white rose. Pretty, isn't it?" Mason always possessed fine fancies ; but then, who could look on you and not call you fair?"

"I don't know," said Lady Cecilia doubtfully "Some people call me homely."

"Homely !" exclaimed Lady Grantly, lifting her eyes in mock horror. "It's pure envy, my dear, pure *envy* ! You have the sweetest complexion, the most lovely eyes I ever beheld ; and what is more, you won't fade young. In fact, my dear, I have an idea that each succeeding year will only add to your good looks, as it has to mine. I am not vain, but I know I do n't fade. Women of our stamp never do. We go down to our graves, carrying our girlish looks with us. We should be thankful, very thankful, indeed," and Lady Grantly surveyed her sallow face complacently in the pier glass opposite.

"But time flies, *petite*. I am due at Lady Hantley's at five, and I shall barely have time to return home and dress. Our chat has been so pleasant that I came near forgetting my errand, which is that **you**

shall dine with us to-morrow. Only a few guests invited ; quite a family gathering. You will be sure to come *petite* ? That is right ; now kiss me, for I must go. Let me have one to carry to Mason ? Oh, you won't ? you little silly ! I predict the day is not far distant when you will be less chary of those kisses ; but *bon jour*," and Lady Grantly sailed down the terraced walk to her carriage, stopping ever now and then to blow a kiss from her gloved finger-tips to the little figure watching her from the wide piazza.

"All is well," she murmured. "The little fool worships the very ground he walks upon. She would marry him to-morrow ; and as for Mason, he must — he *shall* — yield to my wishes. Home, James."

CHAPTER VII.

THE ROVING ARTIST.

I do remember, too,
She told me of a mermaid once, that lay
Along the scooped side of a hollow wave,
Singing such dulcet music, that the ear,
Like a woo'd damsel, trembled with delight.

—*Sir A. Hunt's Julian.*

“**P**ERSEPHONE has come back,” said Kitty Kaw, stooping to pluck a cluster of violets and daisies ; “and these darlings sprang up under her white feet as she went tripping through the meadow. See, how glad everything looks — Demeter is rejoicing over her child’s return. Ah, me ! how pleasant to be a lovely goddess ; only, I should not like old Pluto to marry me and carry me off to Hades in spite of myself ; still, almost any fate is preferable to being Katherine Kaw and living with aunt Hester Hinkley.

“Let me see,” and the young lady counted diligently upon her white fingers ; “I have been here just eighteen days—it is May now—and we have had just thirteen quarrels. I presume we should have had more, only I was shut up four days in my room, and the other one day aunt Hester went away. I declare, it’s very little enjoyment I get out of life. I dare say I shall receive a fine scolding for running away this afternoon. ‘Katherine,’ the *cat* will inquire at the tea-table, ‘have you been netting?’

“Netting, indeed ! oh, how I hate it !” and Miss Kitty made a disdainful little *moue*. “How could Penelope ever endured to pull out her netting every night, only to begin all over again the next day. It must have become dreadfully tedious ; but then it was all for love, and one can even die for that—so the poets sing. I wonder if I could net twenty years, all for love ? No telling what I might do ; but I must confess, I feel immensely unlike it now. I really hope I shall never fall in love—deep down right in love—for it must be a very uncomfortable state to be in. However, I suppose I am liable to, as the disease has been infectious ever since Adam conceived a fancy for Eve. Who knows but I may do as poor mamma did—make another dreadful *mesalliance*—marry a strolling artist. I hardly think I should dare to, though, as a second stain upon our family escutcheon would certainly cause all the defunct Hinkleys to rise out of their graves, and every night I should awake to find a supernatural row of them ranged about my bed—all pointing the finger of shame at me. It would give me a delightful sensation to watch them. Of course the blue bloodiest one, which would be my seventeenth great grandfather, would hold the place of honor ; and so on down. They would all be dressed in long white robes, and have blue lights dancing about their heads. The scene would beggar a pyrotechnic exhibition ; but I shouldn’t enjoy it—no, I really shouldn’t.

“Then, on the other hand, if there were no grandfathers concerned in the case, nor any family es-

cutchcon to preserve, I should hardly care to marry a strolling artist, for they are always so dreadfully poor. It wouldn't agree with my constitution to live on paint. I should tire of sticking my head in at the studio door every day and inquiring: 'Which shall it be for dinner, my love, Vandyke brown with ultramarine and ochre, or ultramarine with cadmium and vermillion?'

"No, I couldn't endure it. I should greatly prefer to be rich and have carriages and servants and a grand house to live in.

"Mercy on me!" exclaimed Miss Kitty, suddenly rising from her reclining posture under an old oak tree, and cutting the thread of her soliloquy short; "I see one now—I see a man! and he is coming straight towards this place. It is one of those abominable strolling artists, as I live! I recognize him by his camp-stool and sketch-book. Oh, dear, where shall I fly to! I must away before he discovers me, falls in love with me, steals my heart from me—before he gets a rope ladder to my window and elopes with me!" and lifting the skirt to her dainty white robe just high enough to show the prettiest little slippered feet in the world, the affrighted maiden scampered away to her boat which lay concealed among the bushes that bordered the banks of Mermaid Isle.

"'He that fights, and runs away, shall live to fight another day,'" she quoted, laughingly, as she seated herself and gathered up the oars; "I didn't

exactly fight this time, but I ran away, which signifies that I may return to fight another day."

Mr. Ralph Otis, utterly unconscious of the danger he had escaped—of falling in love, etc.—sauntered carelessly on towards the spot just vacated for his benefit by Miss Kitty Kaw. Planting his camp stool under the very tree where that young lady had so lately reclined, he seated himself, and lighting a cigar—man's ever solitary companion—leaned lazily back and gave himself up to thought.

"I am really sorry for the old boy," said that gentleman, presently, removing the cigar from his mouth and gazing at it intently. "The little Brandon party isn't exactly to my fancy, either; but the mater is stubborn, and I imagine Mason is done for. Let me see, what does he say?" and Mr. Otis produced a crest-mounted envelope, from which he drew forth a crest-mounted sheet closely written upon.

DEAR OLD FELLOW :

Yours was received and contents noted. You happy-go-lucky-dog ! I fairly envy you your Bohemian life—so free from care, and with nothing to do but to paint and enjoy yourself; while I am continually dragged at the wheel of society, and made a martyr of in every possible way.

Of course there has been the same routine of amusements since you left—hunting, shooting, the turf, balls, receptions, *champetres* of late, etc., etc.; but, my dear boy, it palls—it palls. To speak the plain truth, I am heartily sick of the whole business, and should enjoy nothing better than an entire change of scene, air and country.

"When the gods wage war, woe betide the unfortunate." To complete my misery, old boy, the mater has taken a fancy into

her head to wed me (her only hopeful), and great heavens! to that wishy-washy, simpering, smirking, little fool of a Cecilia Brandon! Picture that woman for a wife—*my* wife of all others! It is enough to make a man shudder; but I never saw the mater more determined, and you know the old saying, my boy—

“Where is the man who has the power and skill
To stem the torrent of a woman's will?
For if she will, she will, you may depend on't;
And if she won't, she won't, and there's the end on't.”

I am really afraid that between them both (unless I fly) I shall be unable to run the gauntlet. Confound it! the whole thing seems settled already, and without my raising a finger. Wishy-washy appears very much in love with me, and takes it hard if I do not devote myself especially to her; although I never gave the little simple one wink of encouragement. Now if it were your Kitty Kaw, or some other divinity akin to her, I might endure it. That was a pretty idea about the stars resembling her eyes—but it won't wash. Heaven only knows what women of the present day are composed of—I don't; but depend upon it, in this case, it was belladonna. Still, I should like to see her. You say her aunt is a Hinkley—of Devonshire? A fine old family, that—knighted during the reign of Henry the Eighth, by Wolsey. Send me a sketch of Hinkley Park, as you call it.

You remember the Grandale lawsuit? It is impossible, as yet, to discover the slightest trace of Richard Grandale. Martins has given up in despair, while I cherish but a faint hope. I do wish they might find him; I feel unaccountably interested in the case. Hunt for him among the fossils of Briartown, my boy; enquire of the Mrs. Betsy Snibbs—she may know. I wish I was there to help you. Should the mater prove too strong, I may fly to you. Until then, adieu.

Yours affectionately,

MASON GRANTLY.

“That letter,” said Mr. Otis, replacing it in the envelope and returning it to his pocket, shows the fal-

lacy of we poor mortals ever expecting to obtain that precious boon — contentment. What more, let me ask, could my Lord Mason Grantly desire than he already possesses? He has honor, riches and one of the finest old ancestral homes in Lincolnshire, England, and yet” (Mr. Ralph Otis executed a low, peculiar whistle, as if to give vent to his surprise), “that very lord goes envying me my low estate. It is a pity, cousin mine, that we can not change places for a time, if only to teach you a useful lesson. But I do not envy you; I envy no one,” he added, his eyes dreamily following the line of the distant hills. “Art is glorious, and well worth living for. It is better than riches. No, my lord, I would not change places with you. I prefer my quiet, roving life, to your restless one. Mine suits *me*, ‘for I love all Nature’s bounteous gifts — from yonder mountain’s rugged peaks, to a daisy’s star-shaped shadow on the naked stone.’ I had rather dream my dreams and realise them in the tracery of my brush; I had rather paint this grand old scenery than pay my court to a Lady Cecilia. When I choose me a wife, it shall not be my lady, but my love. My lady looks for a long rent-roll and stately mansion to match her own, while my love sings blithely under a cottage-roof of thatch, and dreams not of riches that were never hers. Hark! What is that?”

Ralph Otis sprang from his seat and listened eagerly. Over the water came floating a fresh, young voice, singing in plaintive tones a sweet old Scottish song:

“Hame, hame, hame ! oh, hame fain wad I be :
Oh, hame, hame, hame, to my ain countrie !
When the flower is i’ the bud an’ the leaf is on the tree,
The lark shall sing me hame to my ain countrie.
Hame, hame, hame, oh, fain wad I be !
Oh, hame, hame, hame, to my ain countrie.”

His eye caught the gleam of a white robe and the flutter of a black ribbon ; then the little skiff turned the point, and only the soft, sweet voice was wafted back to him, growing fainter and fainter until it died away in the distance.

“Jupiter ! what a song !” exclaimed Mr. Otis, more emphatically than elegantly. “I can almost fancy it is the banished Jacobite himself mourning for his ‘hame, hame, hame.’ It is said that Walter Scott could never listen to that song without shedding tears. I wish he could have heard this siren sing it, for surely it is nothing less than a siren who haunts this lake and sings in such heavenly tones.

“Shall I plunge in after her, or shall I stop my ears and sail away from this dangerous vicinity as quickly as possible ? Ah, I wish she might sing once more ! Methinks ’t would be sweet indeed, to be lured to some enchanted isle, in the wake of such a voice. I must write to Mason that I have at last discovered a veritable siren. If I remember aright, the old boy used to be skeptical, when we were at Eton, concerning that wonderful tale in the ‘Odyssey.’ He shall be brought to a knowledge of its truth.”

Shouldering his camp-stool and with sketch-book in hand, Ralph Otis went slowly homeward through

the soft early twilight, whistling in an undertone
Kitty Kaw's song :

“Hame, hame, hame, to my ain countrie.”

That very evening the following characteristic
epistle was indited to my Lord Mason Grantly :

DEAR OLD BOY : 'Tis the fashion to emigrate to America—
so very fashionable that the discovery I am about to inform you
of has given me but a momentary shock.

My boy, the sirens are here—the veritable sirens that sat on
the rocks and by their melodious voices sought to allure Ulysses
to the enchanted island. I swear to you that I heard one singing
this very evening, and caught the golden gleam of her hair as she
floated along. This lake is her dominion. Like a vast mirror it
reflects her fair face, and as she skims over its surface in her fairy
boat, the very fishes come up to frolic about her and listen to her.
When her voice first broke upon my ear, I had all I could do to
restrain myself from plunging in after her, and thereby sacrificing
my life. In case this should occur again and I not be able to
resist, I have borrowed ear-stoppers in the shape of cotton bat-
ting from Mrs. Betsy Snibbs. By the way, that oracle sniffs up
her nose at my idea, and declares my siren is no less than our
mutual divinity, Kitty Kaw. But I do not believe her. No mor-
tal maiden could sing like that. It is surely a siren turned fash-
ionable, and emigrated to America.

Unfortunately I can give you no clue of Richard Grandale.
Briartown is utterly ignorant of the name and the oracle is mum,
although she did suggest that I might go up to the graveyard
and read the tombstones, as two or three had died and was buried
there, that she hadn't taken “no reckoning of.” I followed her
very excellent advice, but came back disappointed. Nothing was
to be learned. It looks likely that the “able-bodied paupers” will
soon have an opportunity to chuckle openly over a thick slice of
old Sir Richard's wealth. Not a deserving poor person will
receive a stiver, old boy ; but gormandized missions, superinten-

dents of charitable institutions, etc., etc., will pocket the cash. So the world goes ! Heigho ! To be sure, my boy, obey the mater, marry the little Brandon, settle down and be happy. She is not as beautiful as my Kitty Kaw, but she is rich, which is *comme il faut*.

However, should the pressure prove too strong, and you utterly refuse to be sacrificed, fly to the ever-open arms of your humble cousin.

The wee sma' hours are upon me. Adieu, old fellow, adieu.

Yours affectionately, RALPH OTIS.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN INDIGNANT NIECE.

Tradition's pages

Tell not the planting of thy parent tree.—HALLECK.

I SHOULD be pleased to know," said Miss Hester Hinkley, "who your father was?" She was seated bolt upright on one of the uncomfortable-looking *tete-a-tetes* in the great drawing-room at Hinkley Park, eyeing her pretty niece severely. Miss Kitty was seated just opposite, busily employed in twisting one long golden curl over a snowy finger.

"I believe," answered that young lady demurely, "his name was Richard Kaw."

"Richard Kaw!" sniffed Miss Hester in supreme contempt; "and *who*, pray tell me, was Richard Kaw?"

"My father."

Miss Hester jerked off her spectacles and wiped them; replacing them squarely upon her nose, she gazed long and steadily through them at her refractory young relative.

"Where did he spring from?" she inquired at length, in such a sepulchral tone that it seemed to Kitty as if one of the dead and gone grandfathers had suddenly risen and spoken for her.

“I do not know,” answered the culprit, considerably startled.

“Nor any one else,” continued Miss Hinkley. “He was an upstart—one of the vulgar mass. His grandfathers might have been tinkers or tailors for all that —”

“And have been none the worse for it,” broke in Kitty, indignantly. “I do not thank you, aunt Hester Hinkley, to speak ill of my father. He was at least a gentleman.”

“A gentleman!” sneered Miss Hester; “a snob, you should say, an out-and-out snob! I have no patience or respect for a man without a pedigree.”

Miss Kitty made no reply to this, but began quietly to unwind the soft golden curl from her finger.

“Katherine,” said Miss Hester firmly, “it is my wish—nay, command—that you drop once and for all the detestable and plebeian name of Kaw, and adopt that of your mother—Hinkley.”

Kitty sprang to her feet, her eyes ablaze with anger. “What!” she exclaimed indignantly, “change my lawful name, my father’s name, the name my mother loved and honored, for that of Hinkley! You mistake me, aunt Hester, if you suppose for one instant that I would do such a thing.”

“Very well,” remarked Miss Hinkley, seemingly not at all discomposed by this outburst; “you are aware of my command, Katherine. A Kaw shall never inherit Hinkley Park. You shall never be acknowledged as my heir until you once and for all renounce that name.”

“Then I shall never be acknowledged as your heir, aunt Hester, for I would not give up my own name for a thousand Hinkley Parks.”

“As you see fit, Katherine! You are standing in your own light!” and Miss Hester resumed her netting with this wise admonition: If that young lady had finished dawdling in that shiftless manner with her hair, she should advise her to take her work in hand.

Miss Kaw picked up the despised netting and very ungraciously left the room.

“I shan’t net! I won’t net!” she exclaimed spitefully to herself as soon as she was safely out of Miss Hester’s hearing, “and she needn’t think she can make me! I am going to walk,” and snatching her hat from its peg in the hall, she ran hastily down the terrace out into the park, her heart filled to overflowing, with hurt, angry feelings.

“Poor papa,” she murmured, brushing away the great tears that kept slipping down her cheeks. “Oh, what was there against you that I should be asked to give up your dear name? Did you think I would do it? No! not for all the wealth of the Indies; not for a thousand million Hinkley Parks! Katherine Hinkley, indeed!” (her mood suddenly changing.) “That was just like aunt Hester — still harping. I never in all my life saw any one who laid so much stress upon *family* as she does. I can not see, for my part, if people behave themselves, it should make any difference whether their blood is blue, pink or yellow. I am sure I don’t care what color mine is; but that

shows that I am plebeian in my ideas — ‘very plebeian,’ as aunt Hester would have it. I suppose I take it all from the Kaws, whoever they may have been. Papa was the only one I ever heard of, though, and mamma once hinted to me that that was not his real name. How funny if we should sometime find out that he had as blue blood in his veins as aunt Hester ever dared to boast of. Wouldn’t she droop her feathers then?” and Miss Kitty laughed musically at the thought of Miss Hester’s would-be chagrin.

Forgetting her sorrow and anger in the laugh, the girl wandered away, singing a soft low ditty to herself. Suddenly there was a crash of something falling. She started back in amazement. In her preoccupation Miss Kitty had come straight upon a strolling artist, passing in such close proximity to him as to overturn his portable easel.

“Oh, my!” ejaculated that young lady, aghast.

“No harm done,” said the young man (for it was a young man; Kitty had noted this at the first), raising his hat politely, then stooping to pick up the fallen easel. “Pray excuse my intrusion in the park. It was taking an unwarrantable liberty, but the view across the lake was so charming from this point that I could not resist the temptation.”

Kitty Kaw felt flurried and nervous. Had not aunt Hester warned her repeatedly in cutting sarcasm against this sort of man? What should she do? pass him by in haughty silence, or acknowledge his apology by supplementing one of her own? Another stolen glance; Kitty decided to be civil.

“You have a perfect right in the park ; it is open to every one,” she replied, sweetly, “and I really hope my awkwardness in upsetting the easel has not damaged your picture.”

“Not in the least,” said the artist.

“May I look at it ?” inquired the young lady.

“Oh, certainly,” and he held up for her inspection his morning’s sketch.

“It is ‘the cove !’” exclaimed Kitty, in delight “How beautiful it is ! I love pictures very much. My father was an artist ”

“Indeed,” said the young man, his eyes resting upon the sweet face ; “I should have thought as much.”

“Why ?” she asked.

“Because you remind me of an artist’s daughter. Would you like to look through my sketch-book ?” (holding it toward her.) “The sketches are poor, as most of them were made in my college days. Still you may find something interesting, as you are so fond of pictures.”

Kitty hesitated : Would it be just right and proper to stay and look through this young man’s sketch-book ? She would dearly love to see the pictures. Well, what was the harm ? She decided to remain.

“Thank you,” she said, taking the book and accepting the proffered camp-stool.

The sketches were varied bits of English scenery, and full of interest to Kitty. “What a beautiful place !” she exclaimed suddenly.

“That,” said the artist, glancing over her shoulder, “is Grantly Manor, in Lincolnshire, England; and the property of Lord Mason Grantly—a cousin of mine. We were class-mates at Eton, and I was often at the manor; still, it can not equal this,” (taking the book from her and turning to another sketch,) “‘Castle Vale’—the most beautiful country seat in all England.”

The girl’s eyes lit up with pleasure as they rested upon a noble old castle, with its turrets and gables rising above the tall trees that environed it.

“To whom does it belong?” she asked.

“At present it is without an owner—being held in trust. It was formerly the property of Count Richard Grandale—an old man, enormously rich. He is dead now; and by a singular clause in his will, the property stands, as I have told you, without an owner. The story goes—that old Count Richard had one grandson—a namesake—whose parents dying when he was young, was adopted by his grandfather and lived at Castle Vale. The old man loved him very tenderly; but as young Richard grew to manhood, trouble arose between them; they quarreled fiercely, and suddenly the young man disappeared to return no more. Old Count Richard never mentioned his name from the hour he left Castle Vale till his death; and all supposed that he had forgotten him. But they were mistaken; for upon reading the will it was found that—possessing no near relative aside from his grandson, and the estate not being entailed—the property was to be divided among distant heirs, up-

on a certain condition—namely: that the missing Richard Grandale be found, or satisfactory proofs of his death given within two years. In case of their failing to find Richard Grandale, or to give satisfactory proofs of his death, the whole amount, some six millions, went to charitable purposes. However, if Richard Grandale should be found, or an heir, he was to assume the title and inherit for his share Castle Vale and one million in gold—while the rest was to be equally divided among the said heirs.”

“I do hope they will find him,” said Kitty, earnestly.

“Or an heir,” put in the young man, “which would serve the same purpose. It does seem a pity that beautiful Castle Vale should fall into the hands of greedy executors, who will eat all the meat and content themselves by throwing the bones to the poor. Such seems to be the prevailing fashion at the present day.”

“If Castle Vale were only mine,” mused Kitty.

“What would you do?” he asked.

“I would throw open all its wide doors and halls, and every one that came should be welcome—even the poorest beggar. Not one should go away empty-handed; and I would——” Kitty paused—suddenly remembering that she was addressing a stranger.

“It is a pity you are not the heir,” he said, laughing; “Castle Vale is sadly in need of such a mistress, and as for a lord——”

The young lady was beginning to realize the enormity of her misdemeanor. She had certainly spent

one-half hour conversing pleasantly (she could but admit it had been pleasantly) with a strolling artist. It would never do. She froze instantly. "Good morning," she said in the iciest of tones—handing him the sketch book.

"May I not hope to see you again?" inquired the young man, eagerly.

"No," returned Kitty, plainly—determined to instantly put down all presumptuous ideas; "no young man need expect to meet me. I am living in entire seclusion—the companion of Miss Hester Hinkley."

"Ah, excuse me," he remarked, with an amused twinkle in his eye; "but if I have understood aright, Miss Hinkley is considerably your senior?"

"Between minds that are akin, the disparity of a few years is as nothing," said Miss Kitty, loftily. "There may be a slight difference in our ages, but we are very nearly alike in our ways. Good morning, sir."

"Good morning, madam," and the young man took off his hat, and bowed as low and respectfully as if she were a hundred years his senior.

"I think that extinguished him," laughed Kitty to herself, "when he found I was boon companion to aunt Hester. I did her ways to perfection; and I must keep them by me, for such young men are dangerous. This one has fine eyes, and if there is anything I do admire it is fine eyes."

The artist stood as she had left him, watching her retreating form. "As beautiful as a houri!" he exclaimed to himself; "her face is a perfect picture.

So this is Mrs. Snibbs' divinity—the veritable Kitty Kaw. She is an odd mixture of the school-girl and woman. How she took on that old Hecate's airs. My little lady, I shall endeavor to see you again in spite of your attempt to freeze me.”

CHAPTER IX.

THE DISCOVERED AMBROTYPE.

I'll keep this secret from the world
As warily as those that deal in poison,
Keep poison from their children.

—*Webster's Duchess of Malfy.*

LAWYER MARTINS, my lady," announced the pompous butler—pausing, for a moment, in the open doorway of the great drawing-room of Grantly Manor.

The Lady Eleanore gave a violent start, as if some inward fear had suddenly possessed her; then sank back into her chair, pale to the very lips. "What does he wish, James?" she asked, in an agitated voice.

"To see you, my lady, upon private business. He bade me particularly to say, 'private.'"

One hand closed spasmodically over the other lying so idly in my lady's lap, and it was with an effort that she steadied her voice to answer with her usual calmness: "Very well; show him into the library, James. I will come presently."

The domestic automaton bowed respectfully and walked away to deliver his message to the waiting Mr. Martins, without once seeming to have noticed his mistress' agitation.

Lady Eleanore watched him depart, and the

frightened look came back to her face. "What can he want this time?" she murmured, pacing nervously up and down the great room. "Oh, how I fear this man! Can it be—no, it can not be—that he is about to disclose my secret! He wishes to see me on private business. Oh, how I dread this interview! But I must go to him;" and with one hand pressed tightly against her fast-beating heart, Lady Eleanore passed down the wide hall, and opening the library door, entered.

So slight was her step, that the lawyer had not noticed her entrance. He stood with his back towards the door, deeply engaged in contemplating a portrait of Lady Eleanore, in her youthful days, which hung over the marble mantel.

"He has her features," he soliloquised aloud; "but his eyes, and expression, are his father's own."

A spasm of terror contracted Lady Grantly's face, which, even through the rouge that dyed her faded cheeks, blanched a sickly white. She stretched out one trembling hand, in a bewildered way, as if to save herself from falling. It came in contact with a delicate crystal vase standing upon a bracket near. With a crash the bauble fell to the floor.

The noise startled the lawyer from his reverie. He turned instantly.

"Ah, my lady," he exclaimed, "a thousand pardons! Excuse my wretched stupidity, in not observing your entrance; but you see, I was so lost in contemplating yonder picture, and wondering that during all these years you could have changed so

little, that I really did not hear you. Allow me to assist you ;” and he came forward to where Lady Eleanore was busily employed picking up the fragments of glass to hide her agitation.

“No matter—the servants will attend to it,” she said coldly, recovering herself.

“As you please, my lady. I called to—ahem ! consult you about—as you are well aware—certain unpleasant facts which I hold in my possession ;” and the lawyer ran his fingers rapidly through his hair, until it stood on ends.

“What !” faltered Lady Eleanore ; “you do not intend to disclose——”

“By no means, madam ; only, you know as well as I this is a very important affair, and should I make it public I might come into a fortune.”

“I know, I know,” said my lady—her breath coming in short gasps—“but you would not betray me?—you promised——”

“Yes, I promised,” assented the lawyer, “and of course my promise shall remain inviolate ; but you must know, my lady, the remuneration is rather small for such an *important* secret.”

“You wish more ?”

“Exactly, my lady.”

“How much more will satisfy you ?”

“A thousand pounds.”

“And, if I pay it to you, do you solemnly swear to keep this secret ?”

“I solemnly swear, my lady, that I will never divulge that your son is not——”

“Oh, hush !” she exclaimed in affrighted tones—laying one hand quickly over his mouth—“the very walls may have ears—do not speak it aloud ! Tomorrow you shall have your money. Now, leave me.”

“As you desire,” said the lawyer, respectfully. “Good afternoon, my lady. I shall remember my promise.”

Lady Grantly was alone. Sinking upon her knees, she buried her face in the cushions of a chair, and remained motionless for a long time. At last she rose, stole to the door and softly locked it. Resuming her former position, she drew from her bosom a locket fastened to a slender gold chain. Opening this, she gazed long and earnestly upon the dark, handsome face enclosed. One by one tears welled up into her eyes and chased each other in quick succession down her faded cheeks, and with the very abandon of grief she threw herself into a chair and pressed her lips to the pictured face. “Oh, Lawrence ! Lawrence !” she sobbed, “how I loved you ! but I sinned against you. I sold myself for gold ! Oh, if you could only come back from the grave to tell me that you forgive me !”

A step, quick and firm, sounded through the hall. With a frightened gesture, Lady Grantly thrust the locket back into her bosom and quickly unlocked the library door ; then seizing a book, seated herself and became to all intents deeply engrossed in reading.

The footsteps grew more distinct every instant,

and at last paused; the knob to the library door turned, and Lord Mason Grantly entered the room.

"You here, mother?" he exclaimed in a tone not unmingled with annoyance.

"Yes, Mason, I was reading," replied Lady Grantly, in a voice of forced calmness. "I am going now," making a movement to retire.

"No, stay, mother," he said quietly. "I have a few words to say to you, and I may as well say them now as ever."

"Well, my son."

"I wish an explanation in regard to my marrying Cecilia Brandon; I wish to know *how* I am likely to become a beggar?"

"Really, my lord, I have quite forgotten the wonderful conversation you refer to."

"Mother," he exclaimed sternly, "you shall not elude me in this manner! You remember perfectly well! I *will* know!"

"You *will* know!" she answered in a hard, cold tone—her mood suddenly changing. "Have I not already told you the conditions, my lord?"

"That is not enough. I wish to know *why* I shall be a beggar.

"And I reiterate, you *shall* not know! The secret is mine, and I have sworn not to divulge it."

"Mother," he said, drawing close to her, while a swift pallor overspread his dusky face, "is it—tell me—is it anything concerning my father? Am I not his lawful son?"

A ringing laugh was his reply.

“You foolish boy,” said the lady, “what a silly question to ask : Are you Lord Sidney’s son? Yes, if I were his wife. Forget what I have said, my son, and only remember that it is *my* wish that you should wed the Lady Cecilia — the wish of your mother who held you on her knee in infancy, and has always loved you with more than an ordinary mother’s love.”

The stern look died out of the young man’s eyes, and he stooped and kissed her tenderly.

“You will, my son?” she said, with a pleading look.

“I will think of it, mother. Wishy-washy is n’t exactly to my fancy, but seeing you so desire it, I will promise to think about it. Good evening.”

“Will you not look in at Lady Hantly’s reception this evening, Mason?”

“Yes, later ; I have letters to write now,” and he held the door open for Lady Grantly to pass out.

“I am convinced it was merely a freak of hers,” he said in a tone of relief, as he crossed the room and drew out the slides to the *secrétaire* ; but I am so unlike *him* that I did not know at first ; I have been a fool to allow a woman’s morbid fancy to disturb me. All this is lawfully mine” — glancing about him with a look of pride — “and no one has the power to wrest it from me.”

Lord Mason Grantly was a proud man — proud of his old name and ancestral home ; prouder by far than all the dead and gone Grantlys had ever dared to be. “Yes, it is mine,” he repeated, “*mine*, and only mine.”

He unlocked several drawers, and taking out their contents — packages of old letters, musty deeds, etc. — began busily to sort them. “It must be among these,” he commented, taking up the last package. “Let me see ! Ah, here it is,” and he drew forth a time-yellowed letter, addressed to Lord Sidney Grantly. This he perused eagerly. It was a friendly, rambling letter, full of all sorts of things — descriptions of bits of scenery, a criticism on a noted picture, and so on. It was dated at Rome, and signed Richard Grandale.

“Not an atom of use,” muttered Lord Mason. “I thought that it might, perhaps, contain some clue ; but it does not,” and he flung it impatiently one side. As he did so, something slipped from the envelope and fell with a metallic ring upon the polished wood of the *secretaire*. Lord Mason picked it up and examined it with interest. It proved to be a small ambrotype, about the size for a locket, very much faded, but still revealing the noble face of a young man of twenty, or thereabouts.

“This must be Richard Grandale himself,” said Lord Mason. “What a fine, noble face it is ! I do wonder why he quarreled with the old count, and why he disappeared so suddenly, never to return ? It is a mystery beyond comprehension. This letter to my father was written the Winter he spent in Rome, studying art. He was an artist of no mean type, I have heard, and his criticism shows it. It is singular that I have become so deeply interested in this case. Why, if I were only a detective, I would search the

wide world over until I found Richard Grandale, or brought back news of his death. At any rate, my search has not been wholly worthless. To-morrow, I will show this to Martins. It may yet prove of some use; and placing the ambrotype carefully between the leaves of his pocket-book, he relocked the drawers to the *secrétaire*, then lighting a cigar, settled back in his chair and gave himself up to meditation.

“ ‘Her eyes are like the stars,’ ” he repeated, absently watching the curling rings of smoke from his cigar. “ How absurd that that sentence should haunt me as it does; how utterly ridiculous that a simple country girl whom I have never seen, nor Ralph either, should occupy such a place in my thoughts. ‘She sings like a siren’—that is the latest, I believe. I expect this wonderful being will yet embody every charm under the sun. Ralph is an idiot. How I should like to bear down on the old fellow, though, for a few months. What a surprise it would be to him to behold me walking into Mrs. Betsy Snibbs’ parlor—portmanteau in one hand, and a fishing-rod in the other. I expect the dear old boy would consider me an optical illusion. After all, why not go? In visiting America, I stand a bare chance of discovering some clue of Richard Grandale. By the fast line of steamers, it is scarcely more than a trip across the channel; then, I can easily be home again by October—before Parliament goes into session. Yes, I have more than half a mind to go—in fact, I will go.”

Having arrived at this conclusion, my lord flung

his half-smoked cigar out of the low French window—repaired to his room, rung the bell for his valet, and making a hasty toilet was soon *en route* for Lady Hantly's reception.

Lady Cecilia Brandon's dull little eyes brightened, as Lord Mason entered the Hantly drawing-room; and a pleased smile broke over her insipid face, when, after a few words with the hostess, he made his way directly to her and asked for the first dance.

He was very attentive all that evening, and the little lady's hopes rose higher and higher every moment. "She had surely won him," she whispered confidentially to herself. Lady Grantly was in her element, also—her plan was working to a charm. She dispensed her smiles bounteously right and left—answering one inquisitive dowager—who whispered in her ear, that "she expected to hear of a wedding ere long"—with a low, little laugh full of conscious meaning.

Yes, to more than one that night, it looked as if Brandon Park and Grantly Manor would soon be united—while to the lady in question it became almost a certainty; until, alas! a startling disclosure shattered her high-built hopes. They were standing together in the dimly-lighted conservatory, where Lady Cecilia had pleaded to be taken after an unusually long and fatiguing valse; and my little lady had struck her most charming attitude—leaning against the fountain, dabbling her slender hands in the limpid water.

“Will you attend Lady Latimer’s *champetre*?” she asked, by way of conversation.

“I regret,” replied Lord Mason, “but I shall not be here.”

“Not be here! Are you going away?” she asked, in a tone of dismay.

“Yes; I intend to join my cousin, Ralph Otis, for the summer in America. What relic of barbarism shall I fetch home to you as a *souvenir*, Lady Cecilia?”

“Oh! you are not really going to America?” she gasped.

“Why not? It is but a short trip, at this day, across the Atlantic, and I expect to enjoy myself hugely.”

“But *we* shall be so lonely!”

“Shall you be lonely, Cecilia?” he asked, in an amused tone.

“You know it, well enough,” she pouted.

“Oh, there’ll be Hantly, Wilkes and Edgeworth, beside hosts of others left to console you, *mon amie*.”

“I don’t care for *them*, Mason, and you know it,” she protested indignantly.

“That is as much as to say, you do *care* for *me*, Cecilia. Do you really expect me to credit such a ridiculous idea? You are seeking to raise me to the seventh heaven of bliss, only to plunge me sooner or later into the abyss of despair. No, I can not credit such an assertion, for a moment,” and Lord Mason’s face wore a look of comical doubt.

"It's dowdy to go to America!" continued the little lady.

"Yes, I suppose so. I may come back with only a scalp-lock and in feathers and war-paint; nevertheless, I intend to make the trial. Ah, here's the mater, looking for you, Cecilia. Good-night, and don't quite forget me in my western wilds."

"Good-night," said Lady Cecilia, trying to hide her tears. "I think you are shamefully cruel to desert us."

"Where is he going?" inquired Lady Grantly, who had appeared upon the scene in search of Lady Cecilia, whose chaperone she had acted for the evening.

"To that horrid old America, where they are almost cannibals who eat people alive!"

"There is no danger of my being devoured," laughed Lord Mason. "I am by far too lean, Cecilia. Cannibals like good eating. The rector, now, would only make them a comfortable meal, and he weighs over two hundred."

"Please explain this nonsense," said the elder lady, sharply.

"Certainly, my dear mother; I have just been informing Cecilia that I intend taking a short run over to America to see Ralph, and advising her not to slay too many hearts during my absence."

"Mason, you surely do not mean that you are going abroad?"

"Yes, *ma mere*, for a few months, only. I shall

be back before you fairly miss me ; but I have a fancy to join Ralph for a short time."

Lady Grantly's eyes sparkled with displeasure at this decided announcement ; but she only replied : "Have your own way, you perverse boy. Cecilia and I can exist without you. Can we not, *petite?*"

"He won't be gone long," murmured the little lady.

"No," thought Lord Mason, glancing down at the insipid face with its snub nose and washed-out eyes ; "but that time, however short, will be a relief from your society, my lady."

CHAPTER X.

THE HANDSOME STRANGER.

When shall we three meet again ;
In thunder, lightning, or in rain ?

—MACBETH.

THE most shiftless woman !” remarked Mrs. Betsy Snibbs, shaking her fat fore-finger emphatically at her boon companion and confidant, Miss Polly Quackenbos, as the two sat together in the first-named lady’s private parlor, one sultry afternoon in July.

“That’s what I always told you,” replied Miss Quackenbos, a spinster of some forty odd years’ standing, shaking a very lean fore-finger emphatically in return at Mrs. Betsy Snibbs.

“She’s a heap shiftlesser than the other one,” continued Mrs. Snibbs. “I remark, Polly, that Elder Skit’s first wife was what we won’t find the likes of every day— Good land o’ Goshen ! who be you ?”

This singular and abrupt exclamation on the part of this estimable lady was accompanied by a start from Miss Polly, and a prolonged stare towards the open door.

“Who be you ?” again interrogated Mrs. Snibbs, dropping her lower jaw in sheer astonishment, and looking very much as if the sight of a handsome man

standing upon the threshold of her door was very little short of a miracle.

A very handsome man, Mrs. Betsy thought, and so would you or I have thought, could we have seen him as he stood, leaning gracefully against the doorpost, holding his hat in one hand, while upon the little bench beside him rested a portmanteau and a traveling rug.

“Does Mrs. Snibbs live here?” he inquired politely—an amused smile playing about the corners of his mouth as he noted the consternation he had caused.

“I’m her,” said Mrs. Betsy, recovering herself with an effort; “that is—leastways, if you mean the present Betsy Snibbs, of Briartown. There used to be another family of Snibbses here, an’ there was a Betsy Snibbs amongst them; but she’s bin dead nigh onto thirty years. You’ll find her grave in the northeast, left-hand corner of the graveyard, not far from Deacon ’Spires’es grave. My name was Betsy Shingle afore I was married to Simon Snibbs, who has died and left me a poor widder, to work my way alone. Perhaps it hain’t me you want?”

“I think you are the lady,” said the gentleman, “that is, if you are the proprietress of a certain boarding-house, and number among your boarders a gentleman by the name of Otis?”

“Yes,” replied Mrs. Snibbs, “if you’re meaning Mr. Otis, the gentleman that makes pictures; he boards here. Be you any of his relations?”

“A cousin,” said the stranger. “Is he at home?”

“Lor’, no ! he’s never to hum in the daytime ; he’s always off makin’ pictures. I don’t expect him afore to-night.”

“Can you tell where I shall be likely to find him ?”

“Wal, I can’t just say ; he may be in one place, and he may be in a t’other ; but I heerd him say this morning that he was a-goin’ up to Hinkley Park, to finish that ’ere pictur he’s a makin’ of the cove—which is awful lifelike—hain’t it, Polly ?” I told him it didn’t lack but one thing, an’ that was Kitty Kaw a settin’ on the green bank. She’s an awful handsome gal ! the handsomest we’ve got in these parts.”

“Kitty Kaw,” repeated the stranger, mentally ; “then she really does exist, and has not proven herself a second Marjorie Daw, as I half feared she might, from Ralph’s rhapsodies. I think I will go in search of the old boy. He is evidently boarding the enchanted castle, which means mischief.” (Aloud.) “Can you tell me in which direction Hinkley Park lies !”

“Wal, you go up that road,” said Mrs. Snibbs, pointing with the fat digit, “an’ turn to the first turn you come to ; then go on till you come to some big gates with a little house, what they call a lodge, on one side of ’em ; that’s the entrance to Hinkley Park, the finest place in all the country ’round, though it is owned by an old maid who ought to have her neck wrung for a cheatin’ of her own sister.”

“Thank you,” said the stranger, in reply to this

somewhat unique information. "May I leave my traveling appurtenances here? I shall probably remain sometime with my cousin, and should like to be accommodated if possible."

"Yes," replied Mrs. Betsy, "you can leave your things here, and I'll tog up the spare bedroom for you. It hain't been slept in since Sairy Ann Comfort died. It wants airin' bad. Sairy Ann Comfort was —"

The stranger was half-way down the garden walk, out of hearing of the worthy woman's voice; so Mrs. Snibbs was fain to defer her explanation until another time, while she resumed the broken thread of conversation with Miss Polly.

For once, however, propitious fate interfered and saved the rector's wife her weekly stipend of scandal from the two most inveterate gossips in all Briartown. Yes, for this once the poor, ill-used, over-worked creature was safe, for Mrs. Betsy and her boon companion had entirely forgotten her existence, so engrossed did they become in deep speculations as to whom the distinguished stranger might be; who his ancestors were; where he came from, etc., etc. The sun went down upon these two, their tongues wagging ceaselessly, and the lean fore-finger and the fat fore-finger gesticulating vigorously, but all in vain; the mystery remained a mystery still.

Meanwhile the stranger, utterly oblivious of the curiosity he had aroused in two such worthy minds, sauntered on until he came to the above-mentioned gates. Fortunately they stood wide open. Miss Hinkley having gone that very afternoon for a drive,

the lodge-keeper had not deemed it worth his while to refasten them.

“I wonder if I shall find Ralph in the grounds,” soliloquised the young man. “What a surprise it will be to the old boy—this lighting down upon him. I wish I could catch him hard at work, and step up behind him and administer to him a hearty old Eton dig in the ribs.

“A fine old place,” he remarked, catching occasional glimpses of the mansion as he walked along, through the trees that lined the avenue. “Ralph was right; it resembles immensely our English homes. The architecture is certainly Elizabethan; built probably by some rich lord, who contracted the popular frenzy in earlier days of emigrating to a new world. It forms a striking contrast to the rest of Briartown, which is after the straight rule of modern architecture. However we may have progressed in other things, we have certainly retrograded from our ancestors’ knowledge of this art; while they reached the perfection of beauty, we have reached the perfection of ugliness.

“But while I stand and gaze—*tempus fugit*. The old boy is certainly not immured within those venerable walls; I must seek him elsewhere. This diverging path leads to water, if I mistake not the glimmer between yonder trees. It must be a lake, and I shall probably come upon Ralph making love to a naiad thereabouts.”

The path proved a narrow, circuitous one—winding in and out among the trees, and at last converg-

ing to an open space which commanded a fine view of Mermaid Lake. Suddenly the stranger paused—the sound of a familiar voice greeted his ear, and through the trees he caught a glimpse of the broad back of a man, as he bent over an easel.

“The old boy, by Jupiter!” he exclaimed. “and talking to himself like the imbecile he always was. Softly now, while I steal up and give him a weighty surprise.”

But Mr. Ralph Otis was not talking to himself. Leaning against a convenient tree stood Miss Kitty Kaw—her white dress, with its black ribbons, falling in graceful folds about her, and one little hand dangling a straw flat, garlanded with a wreath of white roses. Miss Kitty Kaw, with her great black eyes lighting up her lovely face like two shining stars, and her wondrous golden hair falling in loose heavy curls about her fair neck and shoulders.

This startling disclosure brought the intruder to an immediate standstill behind a great oak tree, and riveted his eyes full upon this lovely apparition; and there he stood, an unwitting listener to the following conversation:

“I hope,” said the artist, in a deprecating tone, “I have not seriously offended you by this second intrusion in the park, Miss—Miss Kaw?”

“No,” replied that young lady, primly; “as long as my aunt, and companion, Miss Hinkley, allows the park to be traversed by the public, I have no occasion to be offended at whomever I may chance to meet within its limits. Proceed, sir; I really take

an interest in the works of young artists" (laying such peculiar stress upon the word young, that Mr. Otis winced, and in spite of his thirty odd summers suddenly felt himself very youthful and green). "I like to look upon their productions," she continued; "it recalls to mind that in future generations their works may become what Michael Angelo's, Raphael's, Titian's and others are now to us. Pray do not let me interfere, Mr.—Mr.——"

"Otis," said the young man. "You do not interfere in the least—I had really quite finished. If I remember aright, you informed me, upon our first meeting, that your father was also an artist?"

"Yes," replied Miss Kitty—the prim corners of her mouth relaxing, and a soft light creeping into her great eyes—"papa was an artist; and that reminds me—will you show me the sketch of Castle Vale once more?"

"Certainly," said Ralph, quickly producing the book.

"I am almost certain," she said, as she examined it closely; "yes, I *am* certain that I have seen this before—in my own, dear papa's studio."

"Perhaps he had been in England and was acquainted with Castle Vale," suggested the artist.

"I think not," said Kitty; "papa never spoke to mamma of being there, else she would have told me. No, he was never in England. He must have gotten the sketch from some brother artist. What a beautiful, beautiful place it is! I should never tire of looking at it."

“Pray keep the sketch,” said the young man eagerly. “It is but a trifle—and” (he added hypocritically, seeing the look of primness returning to Miss Kitty’s face)—“that is, I thought it might remind you of your father.”

She gazed wistfully at it for a moment, then handed it back. “No,” she replied coldly, “I thank you ; but I do not care to keep it. Good afternoon, sir.”

A crackling sound arrested their attention, and from behind the oak tree emerged the stranger.

Miss Kitty’s departing footsteps were stayed in astonishment. As for the artist, he let fall his palette instantly, and rushing forward seized the intruder by the hand.

“For heaven’s sake ! Mason, where did you drop from ?” he exclaimed.

“Not from the clouds, old boy,” laughed the stranger, returning with vigor the hearty grip. “Yesterday I dropped from a Cunard steamer, and since then I have been *en route*--flying over land and water to your hospitable arms. Who is she ?” he added, lowering his voice. “Introduce me, old fellow, but don’t let on who I am. Call me plain Mr. Mason, or anything your fertile brain may suggest.”

Why Kitty Kaw did not instantly depart, she herself could not have told. She wished to go—her intentions were good—but like a great many other people before her, and under very similar circumstances, she remained ; and, upon her remaining, Fate wove an entirely different strand into the web of her life.

“Miss Kaw,” said Ralph Otis, turning towards her. “allow me to present my cousin, Mr. Mason, who has just arrived from England.”

“Probably here was another strolling artist,” was the thought that flashed athwart this young lady’s brain; and it was the height of impropriety, her even deigning to more than acknowledge in the briefest, coldest manner, the courtly bow and admiring glance bestowed upon her by the not-at-all-abashed Mr. Mason.

But it is human to err, and my heroine, as you must have discovered long since, is of the earth earthy; not one of those celestial beings who never commit a sin during their whole lifetime, which some novelists delight in painting. Miss Kitty was, as I have said, human; and being human, she, instead of listening to the inward monitor who whispered loudly in her ear the sage advice of Miss Hester Hinkley, dropped for one instant the heavily-fringed white lids over her matchless eyes, raised them slowly, and flashed a mischievous, coquettish look full upon the young man, while the soft sweet voice rather drawled: “I am very pleased to meet Mr. Mason.”

Years after, when an ocean rolled between these two; when one wandered a weary exile in a far-off land, dishonored and forsaken, the memory of this day came back; and often and often a picture rose before his dreary vision, of the waning sunlight shifting through the green leaves and resting in flickering shadows upon a girl’s wondrous golden hair; and he saw again

those glorious eyes flash their light upon him, and heard in fancy the clear, sweet voice.

How often we look back upon the events of the past—some startling epoch, either sad or sweet, in our lives—and wonder that the mind can recall every look, every gesture, every insignificant word that dropped from lips long since grown cold or sealed in hatred against us ; wonder that in our intentness we can see again the very robe the loved one wore ; the twisted knot of soft ribbon at the throat ; the dainty nosegay in the belt. Like photographic impressions they stand out before us, and we live again by-gone scenes.

As my Lord Mason Grantly, or plain Mr. Mason, as we must now call him, returned this glance of Kitty Kaw, some dim thought, pertaining to ancient mythology and a modern Aphrodite, must have flitted through his brain ; at any rate, he mentally ejaculated : “ A second Venus, by Jove ! ”

What these two young people might have said to each other ; how far they might have gone towards cementing a lasting friendship, is not to be recorded here. Fate ordained otherwise, for Mr. Mason had barely gotten over a very common-place remark — a remark that has been made by lords and ladies of high degree down to burgher and serf, from time immemorial, and even, I think, must have been the first words Adam addressed to Eve when they were introduced in the garden of Eden, namely, “ We are having fine weather.” He had barely gotten over this

remark when a step was heard—a firm, prim step. A glimpse of a black bombazine dress became visible through the trees, and lo, the mistress of Hinkley Park had captured the reprobate.

It would be impossible for me to depict the look of horror that came into Miss Hester's face, who having returned from her drive was strolling through the park, and had unconsciously come upon these young people. It would be impossible for me to explain the paroxysms that convulsed her virtuous mind as her steely eyes took in the situation. Acting upon general principles, she immediately took off her spectacles and wiped them; replacing them exactly upon the bridge of her nose, she stared long and steadily at the interlopers. If Miss Hester had been a modern Medusa, her victims would certainly have become stone, then and there; but as it was, they merely felt very uncomfortable, and heartily wished themselves at that moment any place outside the limits of Hinkley Park. Turning her eyes slowly, she at last allowed them to rest full upon her niece. That young lady was not so easily abashed, and her black orbs never flinched as they boldly returned this concentrated stare.

“Katherine Kaw,” said Miss Hester, in a tone as measured as if she were keeping time to a funeral march, “Katherine Kaw, what means this?”

“It means nothing, aunt Hester.” replied that young lady, tossing her head with a flippant air that said plainly, I am not at all afraid of you, “only I was walking through the park and accidentally came upon this gentleman, sketching the cove. See! is not

the picture beautiful? Mr. Otis, my aunt, Miss Hinkley; also Mr. Mason, aunt."

"Katherine Kaw," said the elder lady once more, completely ignoring the polite bows the two young men bestowed upon her, "return to the house instantly; and you, sirs, leave this park."

Thus summarily dismissed, Mr. Otis, without farther ostentation, strode away accompanied by Mr. Mason who delayed only long enough to raise his hat gracefully to Miss Kitty, and bestow upon her a look of heart-felt sympathy.

To say that the scene was a stormy one that raged in the drawing-room at Hinkley Park that night, is to tell the exact truth; that is, it was stormy as far as Miss Kitty was concerned, for Miss Hester retained her usual decorum and laid down her mandates in her usual rigid style, not one whit disturbed by her niece's superabundant stock of temper.

"I think," screamed Kitty Kaw, in her indignation, "it was mean! mean!! mean!!! in you, aunt Hester Hinkley, to speak to me in that fashion before gentlemen."

"I was not aware that I spoke to you at all, before *gentlemen*," remarked Miss Hester, laying great stress upon the word.

"What were they, then?" gasped Kitty.

"Strolling artists, vagabonds, who sprang from—no one knows where; if I must say it, men just like your father, Katherine. I can see very plainly from whom you inherited your low proclivities. Heaven

only knows how my poor, misguided sister ever came — ”

“I won’t hear my father spoken ill of ! I won’t hear it ! ” exclaimed Miss Kitty, inserting a finger in each ear. “Oh, my poor papa ! Oh, my poor, poor mamma ! why did you both die and leave your little Kitty all alone in this wide, cruel world ? ” and breaking down completely, the young lady sobbed as if her heart would break, behind her cambric handkerchief.

“Tears,” said Miss Hester, grimly, “are the evidences of a weak mind. I think I never beheld a more vapid, characterless creature than yourself, Katherine Kaw. The Hinkleys are above such *weakness*. You are a Kaw to the very marrow of your bones.”

“Oh, I ’m so lonely — so lonely ! ” sobbed Kitty. “Mamma loved me and called me her little Kitty—her dear, dear little Kitty ! Oh, my poor mamma ! I ’m so lonely without you ! ”

“Great heavens ! ” exclaimed Miss Hester, for once becoming disturbed, “what a fool ! what a consummate fool you are, Katherine Kaw ! Go to your room instantly.”

Nothing loath to obey, Kitty lowered the cambric handkerchief from her eyes sufficiently to make sure of her exit through the drawing-room door, and left Miss Hester’s presence with most unladylike haste.

That lady looked after her with an expression of intense disgust upon her face. “Just like Rebecca,” she muttered, “soft.”

Poor Kitty passed a bad night of it, as she tossed

restlessly upon her tear-wet pillow and sighed for that dead mother's tender touch. Poor little motherless, misguided girl! with her quick, impetuous temper and her warm, loving heart. Do not censure her too harshly, dear reader; her capabilities for good or evil were great. Under loving hands the good would have sprung up and crushed the noxious weeds; but under Miss Hester's hands the weeds already predominated. She wept to-night because she was lonely and unloved. Ah, how many who have long since passed the Rubicon of seventeen have wept for this same reason, and have spent long, weary nights tossing restlessly upon tear-wet pillows! Love is to the human heart what the pure, bright sunshine is to the earth. Without it all is dark and cheerless. There is no heart, however hard, but longs for its presence; and no heart, however hard, but mourns over its loss. Even Miss Hester had had her love-story, and missed its fulfilment.

But youthful woes and youthful pains are fleeting. Miss Kitty dipped her dimpled face in the marble ewer, next morning, and bathed it until the soft pink came back to the rounded cheeks. She lifted one corner of the curtain that shrouded her window. Everything was looking too bright and fresh and gay to be sad; so a merry old song rippled up to her lips, and chased all the shadows away.

CHAPTER XI.

KITTY OUT BOTANIZING.

Pleasure never comes sincere to man,
But lent by Heaven upon hard usury.

—DRYDEN'S *ŒDIPUS*.

MAY I enquire what brought you to America?" asked Ralph Otis, as soon as the gates of Hinkley Park were safely passed and the young men were upon the highway.

"In search of that fickle goddess, Pleasure, my boy," replied Mr. Mason, stifling a yawn and looking somewhat wearily down the long, dusty stretch of road that lay between them and the widow Snibbs' abode; "but I don't seem to have found her as yet. What could have possessed that old she dragon to have pounced down upon us in such a manner? Have you incurred her royal displeasure? I felt sorry enough for the little lady. I tell you, Ral, vulgarly speaking, old England's fairest can not hold a candle to your Miss Kaw. You were right; her eyes are precisely like two great shining stars; and what an air she has—that of a queen!"

Ralph Otis felt a sharp twinge of pain as he listened to his cousin's comments. Why—he could not explain. Surely, any one had a right to speak in this manner of Kitty Kaw. It was but natural that Mason

should admire her. He himself had met her but twice, and was not every lineament of her sweet face already engraven upon his heart? Still, he felt this bitter pain force itself upon him like an evil omen. Was it not a presentiment of a far greater pain he should one day bear, on account of this girl's beautiful face? Did he see in the future that stretched out before him the lonely, dreary lot that should be his? Fate may have lifted the veil for an instant, and his soul have gazed down the dim vista of life's untrodden path! Who can tell?

But however plainly he may have discerned his own destiny, Ralph Otis could not have faintly guessed at the man's by his side, else the bitter pang of envy would not have stolen over him as he gazed into the smiling face so free from care.

"I met the oracle, old boy," continued Mr. Mason, laughing heartily as he related the interview that had taken place between himself and Mrs. Betsy; "and explained to her—as she seemed as much surprised to see me as Aladdin's mother was to behold the genii of the lamp—that I was no illusion, but *bona fide* flesh and blood, and withal a cousin of yours. This latter information seemed to raise me decidedly in her favor; and, upon the strength of it, she has concluded to harbor me beneath her hospitable roof. But remember, old boy, I shall remain *incognito*; for I am determined to pass in Briartown upon my simple merits—or demerits, as it seems so far. My not at all flattering receptions at Hinkley Park, convinces me that the patricians turn their backs

upon me, and that I shall be forced to resort to the plebs. Therefore, Mrs. Betsy, I hail thee ! I return to thy parental bosom to roam no more."

"How did you leave my Lady Grantly and the Lady Cecilia Brandon?" asked Mr. Otis.

"Well, my boy. The mater disapproved to the last, and the little lady wept copiously."

"When," said the artist, slowly, "are you and the Lady Cecilia to be married?"

"Not soon, old boy ; I can not quite make up my mind to wishy-washy. It was mainly to escape her that I came to America. But here we are at the Snibbs' mansion ; and, if I mistake not, the household angel is watching our approach from yonder portico."

Sure enough ; it proved Mrs. Betsy, who informed the stranger that "she had just finished togging up the spare bedroom, and that he would find it all in readiness." For this service he thanked her with such courtly grace as to immediately establish himself in her good favor.

Mr. Mason was soon a general favorite in Briar-town. His handsome face and cordial manner won him scores of friends ; and, before two weeks had passed, he knew the whole village by heart.

Miss Kitty Kaw had not forgotten those black eyes ; in fact, she was rather given to vague speculations as to who this young man might be. As she worked away at the detested netting, she soliloquised in the following manner :

"I suppose if aunt Hester knew I was thinking

about a young man, she would be struck dumb with horror. How very dreadful her coming upon us that day in the park. I know she intended that prolonged stare of hers to completely annihilate me; but I wasn't so easily put down as she thought for. I flatter myself I sustained my part in a highly creditable manner. No, my dear aunt Hinkley, I shall not sink into confusion at a glance from you, or any other high-born dame, though she boasted twice our number of defunct grandfathers. I felt very sorry for the gentlemen. How dared aunt Hester be so insulting as to order them out of the park. They have not been here since; of course they never will come again. I have seen the last of that unusually fine looking young man. Oh, dear!" and Miss Kitty heaved a long sigh—expressive of her disgust at the state of affairs in general.

But my heroine was mistaken. She was to see Mr. Mason again, else this story would never have been written.

Two weeks later—one pleasant afternoon in July—when the hum of the insect began to sound all day, and the green carpet in the park was beginning to take on a brownish hue—which whispered faintly that summer was advancing—this young lady with book in hand wandered toward Mermaid Lake.

"I'll cross over to the island," quoth she; "it looks shady and quiet there, and I do so want to rest. The *cat* has been particularly nagging to-day. Oh, dear! I wish I could go away from Hinkley Park—anywhere! I can not, I will not bear it much

longer ! I will go away and earn a living for myself ! ” and Kitty clenched her little white hands wrathfully, as if she very much wanted to strangle somebody ; and that somebody, I strongly suspect, was Miss Hester, who, by her implied hints and hateful allusions, made life each day more burdensome to her young relative.

Untying a small boat—chained to a slight pier which ran out into the lake several feet—Kitty sprang lightly into it ; and handling the oars in a manner which showed she was performing no unusual feat, rowed swiftly away.

From a secluded spot on the little island, Ralph Otis and Mr. Mason watched her approach with intense interest. The artist sat sketching, and his companion reclined at full length upon the soft green moss, lazily reading in a deep, rich voice, stray passages from “Childe Harold.” Long before the boat touched the shore, Ralph had recognized the graceful gipsy hat, and the white robe with its fluttering black ribbons, with a thrill of delight. Suddenly the oars splashed the water playfully, until it broke into a thousand diamond sprays, and a clear voice began to sing :

“ I coost my line in Largou Bay,
And fishes I caught nine ;
'Twas three to boil and three to fry,
And three to bait the line.
The boatie rows, the boatie rows,
The boatie rows indeed,
And happy be the lot o' a'
Who wishes her to speed ! ”

Nearer and nearer came the boat, till it grated upon the sand. Kitty Kaw sprang out—the fag end of her song dying upon her lips as she came tripping up the bank.

A sharp exclamation of surprise broke from her lips, and a look of intense vexation came into her face as she beheld the young men.

Mr. Mason was on his feet instantly.

“Good afternoon,” he said, smiling.

“Good afternoon,” returned Kitty, petulantly.

“Will you not accept of my camp-stool?” inquired Mr. Otis.

“No,” replied Miss Kitty, firmly; “pray continue with your work (fabricating a lie); “I came after botanical specimens. I must search for them and return home immediately.”

“Perhaps I may be able to assist you,” remarked Mr. Mason, walking leisurely by her side as she moved away; “I used to know something of botany in my boyhood days.”

Now perplexed, Kitty neither knew, nor cared anything about botany. That science had not proved a favorite one with her; and when she had closed the hated books, after a somewhat desultory high school course of study, she felt that she knew as little about it as when she began. It provoked her greatly to think that this “impertinent man,” as she mentally styled him, should force his presence upon her in this manner; and she at once resolved to be very distant and freezing. But to long remain so she found was an impossibility.

Mr. Mason proved himself so interesting, that, before she knew it, she had forgotten her good resolutions, and was laughing merrily at one of his particularly witty sallies.

“Is America anything like England?” she inquired, after all restraint had given away, and they were chatting together like old friends.

“In some respects it is very like; but we have many old ancestral homes, and places of historical interest there, which of course America can not boast.”

“Have you ever seen Castle Vale?”

“Often and often. You surely have never been there?”

“No; but Mr. Otis showed me a sketch of it, and told me of old Count Richard’s will. Do you think they will ever find Richard Grandale?”

“I fear not,” replied Mr. Mason; “their most earnest efforts have proved unavailing. Of late I have abandoned myself to the idea that he must have perished in some far distant land; and that, however diligently they may search, they will find no record of that lost name.”

It proved an hour or more before the young couple found their way back to where Ralph Otis was sitting, hard at work, with a stern, unsmiling look upon his face—as if that golden, summer afternoon held shadows that rested heavily upon his heart. The look vanished, however, as his eyes rested upon Kitty’s smiling, happy face; and he inquired gaily, “if

she had been successful in securing her botanical specimens?"

Kitty's empty hands told the story; and she laughed merrily over the failure of her little *ruse*.

Mr. Mason assisted the young lady into her boat, and through the purple sunset she rowed slowly over the shining water, back to Hinkley Park.

"I have had a good time," she mentally ejaculated, as she drew near the house, "and aunt Hester shall be none the wiser for it."

Meanwhile the artist packed away his tubes of madder, crimson-lake and bright vermillion, which he had been using to finish a brilliant sunset scene—put them away in a tight, little box—just as we sometimes hide our brightest thoughts—and shouldering his easel prepared to depart.

"Did you have a pleasant time?" he inquired of his companion.

"I think," replied that young man, dreamily, "that I never had a better."

Through the green woods they strode along, leaving silence and creeping shadows behind them. At last, the moon rose out of a mist and lit up with her soft silver light all the green, moss-covered mounds of the fairies. Poor tattling Will, in the bushes hard by, began to bemoan his punishment in plaintive notes—"whip-poor-will, whip-poor-will," he cried—and from his home in a rotten tree, "Tithonus"—Aurora's poor old dried up husband—chirped his lonely song all through the summer night.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MEETING IN THE COVE.

“ When the cat’s away,
The mice will play.”

LORD MASON GRANTLY was deeply interested in Miss Kitty Kaw; deeply interested in this simple, country maiden, with her rarely beautiful face and piquant little airs and graces. Comparing her with Lady Cecilia Brandon, of Brandon Park—as he often did—all thoughts of the heiress became insuperable; and my Lady Eleanore Grantly experienced a pang of uneasiness at each fresh arrival of her son’s letters.

“ Why was it that Mason should be so enchanted with that barbarous country?” the lady questioned herself again and again. “ He never mentioned Lady Cecilia’s name; now, it was too bad!” Meanwhile, she was forced to resort to the ungrateful device of manufacturing sundry sweet messages, which she conveyed to the heiress in lieu of Lord Mason’s shortcomings.

Yes, these were days of unrest to Lady Grantly; days in which she seemed living over a loaded mine, which threatened to explode at any moment and shatter all her cherished hopes and schemes. She longed intensely for her son’s return; and this, with the

nameless secret terror, was each day blanching her faded cheeks to a still sicklier hue, and painting great rings about her dull eyes.

Lady Cecilia was growing restless also.

Never exactly firm in the belief of Lord Grantly's love for herself, she grew more and more impatient for his return; and lounged discontentedly in her *boudoir* at Brandon Park, or wandered through the stately rooms, an unhappy little morsel of humanity, surrounded by a great sea of splendor. All this vast wealth could not bring one smile to that drab, little face—no more than it can to any other living mortal's, who knows a heartache which money has no power to heal.

And well might these two women be unhappy—the one pining for a love that had never, for one moment, been hers; the other concealing in her bosom a secret which darkened her whole existence—a secret which even then was slowly, like a huge reptile, uncoiling itself to spring at the throat of its victim.

Though our own hearts may be sad and cheerless, our neighbor across the way may be light and gay; while we weep, *she* may be singing. What for, all the sore and troubled hearts in the world! Not a shadow rested upon Kitty Kaw's this summer's day. She was blithe and merry; for had not aunt Hester gone up to Boston on her annual shopping expedition, and was not this young lady to follow the bent of her own sweet will for two whole blissful weeks?

She wandered into the great drawing-room and thought how much more cheerful and hospitable it

looked without Miss Hester's grim face and solemn black bombaziné robe. "Stay there!" she exclaimed, as she threw the despised netting under a sedate hair-cloth sofa. "I'll have no more of you, until the ogress gets back; I am going to enjoy myself. Yes, Kitty, my dear, have a good time while you can, for two weeks won't last alway," and, half running and skipping the length of the great hall, she caught her gipsy hat from a peg, and sped down the stone steps.

"She's as gay as ony butterfly, noo' the mistress gee'd awa'," said the old butler to himself, as he watched her admiringly; "'t is mony the time I've seen her mith'er, a takin' that same path. My blessin' on her bonnie head."

"Here I am at last," said Kitty, seating, or rather throwing herself, at the foot of a great tree whose branches overhung the lake; "what a glorious run I did have."

"Did you, indeed!" said a voice close by.

Kitty started to her feet and looked about her. In a little cove to the right—under the shade of the friendly trees—was moored a gaily painted boat, and in it reclined Mr. Mason, with book in hand, leisurely puffing away at his Havana.

"Where did you come from?" said Kitty, beginning to pout.

"From across the lake," replied that young man, composedly. "The old boy is sketching over yonder, as usual," pointing to the island, "and as I grew somewhat weary of his company, I concluded to take

a row. The shade of these friendly trees lured me to this spot, but I had no intention of landing," he added somewhat sarcastically.

Now, as much as Kitty in her rebellious little heart detested Miss Hinkley, she was loyal to her in this respect: she never spoke lightly of her in the presence of others. "I am under her roof and partake of her bread," she reasoned, "and it is not for me to speak of her failings." So, deeming that a complete ignoring of this gentleman's latter remark was by far the wisest plan, she said in a dignified tone:

"May I ask what you are reading, Mr. Mason?"

The young man held up for her inspection, a book on Grecian Mythology.

"I was," he replied gaily, "reviewing a much neglected study of my schooldays, in order to be able to converse, intelligibly, with my cousin, Mr. Otis, who firmly believes that the gods and goddesses still exist; and who declares most emphatically that a siren haunts this very lake. Yes, a veritable siren, who sings in the same sweet tones which she used long ago, when, with her sisters, she inhabited that enchanted island in the *Ægean* Sea, and lured men to their death. I shall take good care not to meet with her, Miss Kaw."

"Oh," said Kitty, gravely, "you have no need to fear; that was such a great time ago, when men's hearts were fresh and unsuspecting, and they were more easily made victims of than at the present day."

"I do not know," he replied, looking admiringly

at the girl, "I fear we are not much improved in that respect since Adam, or taking my mythology into account, since Ephimetius received Pandora for his wife, in spite of the warning of Prometheus. We are all apt to yield to afterthought, Miss Kaw."

"I think," said Kitty, hardly heeding him, her eyes fixed on a rosy cloud in the distance, "the old Greeks had a beautiful way of accounting for things. I love to fancy Aurora opening the palace of Helios every morning, and sprinkling her rosy dawn about the sky; the sunrise is always so beautiful! Oh, dear! I wish people believed in such things nowadays, and were not so dreadfully humdrum and practical."

"Yes," replied the young man, "the old Greeks combined the very essence of poetry in their conceptions. They formed the basis for the most of our modern verse. Howsoever we may have progressed, we are always going back to glean again that time-worn field."

From this conversation these two young people fell into animated discussion of our English poets — Kitty bearing her part bravely; for you must not suppose that my heroine carried an empty head. No, indeed! that young lady possessed a retentive memory, and from her school days had stowed away a fair share of general knowledge.

So interested did they become that the sun-god pointed his rays straight toward the earth before either realized the time.

Kitty rose suddenly to go, but Mr. Mason reached

from his boat and took one little white hand in his own, and begged earnestly that he might have the pleasure of taking her for a row on the lake that very evening.

“The cat’s away, so the mice can play,” thought Kitty, “and where is the harm? I may as well enjoy myself,” and consented.

Ralph Otis observed the smile upon his cousin’s face as he drew his boat upon the shore. With the aid of his glass the artist had made himself cognizant of the meeting between the two, and now he arose, pale and determined.

“Mason,” he said, in a tone that caused that young man to start, “I wish to ask you one question: Are you trifling with that girl? If you are, by heaven, though you were my own brother—”

“Trifling with whom?” asked Mason, in surprise.

“With Kitty Kaw. Are you not engaged to Lady Cecilia Brandon?”

“No, I am not, nor ever shall be. Set your heart at rest, old boy! When I trifle with that angel-faced girl, over yonder, you may cut my black heart from my bosom by inches.”

A look of relief came over the artist’s face, though the pained expression did not leave it. He grasped his cousin’s hand, and wrung it heartily.

“How could you think me so base, old boy?” asked Lord Mason. “God knows,” he said earnestly, “how gladly, could I but teach her to love me, I would make her my wife. She is the only girl I can ever love, Ral.”

“You will win her,” said the artist, huskily ;
“how can you help it?”

“Thank you,” he said, looking earnestly at his companion artist, as if a vague suspicion of something wrong had suddenly taken possession of him ; “but tell me, dear old boy, was there anything between you and her before I cut in ? If I thought there was, I would leave for England to-morrow.”

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PROPOSAL.

“ Who ever loved, that loved not at first sight ? ”

YOU have seen the stately lilies lifting their white heads in the moonlight, as you passed down your garden walk, and you have stooped to admire more closely their wondrous beauty and breathe the delicate perfume they shed ! Kitty Kaw looked as fair and stately as one of these white lilies, as she sat in the bow of the boat that night, with a fleecy drapery enveloping her head and shoulders, and her lovely eyes shining like the stars above her.

It was charming — this row over the lake in the soft moonlight. Although Kitty could not rid herself of the feeling that it would be in aunt Hester’s eyes (could she see her) a heinous crime ; neither could she resist a feeling of intense enjoyment, as they glided smoothly over the water, leaving a shining arrow of light behind them. When the eyes opposite met hers she could not overcome the flutter of delight that filled her bosom, or put down the conscious blush that mantled to her cheek.

As for Mr. Mason, he forgot England ; he forgot Lady Cecilia Brandon ; he forgot his mother’s deep displeasure ; he forgot all — everything, only that he loved this peerless creature, sitting so near him, and

that he longed to tell her so—longed to clasp her close in his arms and rain kisses upon her soft red lips.

He forgot that precipitation is too often ruin, and before he was scarcely aware of his intentions, he was pouring out a passionate avowal of his love.

“I love you,” he said earnestly. “Life will be as nothing to me without you! Will you be my wife?”

“Oh, don’t!” gasped Kitty with a frightened little sob; “mercy sake, don’t! Aunt Hester would be so very angry.”

“Aunt Hester!” exclaimed the young man, in accents of lofty scorn, “why should *you* care for *her*? What has she ever done for you, but ill-treat and abuse you? My darling, do not think of her, but come to me!”

“I shall be very pleased if you will row me to the shore,” said Kitty, all at once, in the coldest of tones. “I can not and will not allow you to speak disparagingly to me of my aunt and companion.”

“Don’t you love me, Kitty?” he pleaded. “Say once that you love me!”

“Indeed, I shall not say any such a thing,” replied Kitty, firmly. “I wish to go ashore, Mr. Mason! I repeat, *I wish to go ashore!*”

The young man bit his lips till the blood came, and putting his utmost strength to the oars, the offended damsel soon found herself upon terra firma.

Now, Kitty Kaw had never before in her short life possessed a veritable lover. Her school days had known many boyish admirers, but no one had ever

said to her, like this young man, "Kitty, I love you. Will you be my wife?"

"Will you be my wife?" A question that any man has a right to put to the woman he loves; and, although this little lady's brain was now in a whirl of strange emotions, and she could scarcely tell whether she wanted to laugh or cry most, she was dimly sensible of an honor conferred upon her. Stealing a glance into the dark, angry face before her, which she admired in spite of herself, she felt her heart softening toward this much-abused young man. "Ought she not to apologize!"

"I am very sorry if I have offended you," she said softly.

The shadows disappeared instantly, and his face lit up with a rare smile. "I have been hasty," he said, in self-reproachful tones; "I should not have spoken to you in this manner—you scarcely know me. My only excuse is, that in my great love for you I forgot all else. Now, I only ask that you will not utterly deprive me of the faint hope that I may, in some distant day, win your regard?"

Kitty made no reply, but drooped her head and blushed like a school-girl; and Mr. Mason, in all probability, applying the old adage, "that silence gives consent," pressed the little white hand for one moment in his own, and departed quite well satisfied.

As Kitty fled up the steps to the terrace she came unexpectedly upon Jane, who, from behind a convenient pine tree, had been inquisitively watching

Mr. Mason, and listening intently to the foregoing conversation.

“Oh, Jane,” gasped Kitty, in a sudden spasm of terror, “don’t tell aunt Hester you saw me out there; don’t tell a living soul, and I’ll give you that new leg-horn flat you admired so much.”

“Deed! I won’t, then,” said Jane. “I wouldn’t never think to tell, miss; but”—adding under her breath, as Kitty passed into the house—“may like I’ll drop a mere hint to the mistress. No, I won’t tell; for a hint to my mistress is like the scent of a bone to a hungry dog, an’ I’ll bet she’ll ferret the hull out in no time, an’ mayhaps give me a new lawn gown for me pains. Ah, Jane, you’re a cunning one!”

Kitty retired immediately to her own room, where, opening the shutters, she drew a chair into the bar of the moonlight that streamed in, and sat down to think over what had occurred.

“I hope,” she said to herself, in exact imitation of Miss Hester’s tones, “Katherine Kaw, you are not going to commit the atrocious act of falling in love with this young man? I won’t allow it! Do you hear me!—I won’t *allow* it! You ought to be ashamed of yourself for going out on the water this evening! To-morrow, madam, you shall make yourself a shirred cap and a black bombazine dress, and put away all these youthful follies as becomes a Hinkley. Why, your seventeen illustrious grand-fathers would turn in their very graves could *they* know of your goings on.

“Oh, dear—her tone changing—what a harrowing thing to have a lover one must not love! I do feel so sorry for him! Shall I allow him to hope, as he wishes? I can not see any harm in one’s hoping—providing nothing comes of it. Yes, he may, only I fear it will become very monotonous. But (yawning) I am dreadful sleepy—to bed, to bed. I wonder if I shall dream of dark eyes and a fine face—who knows? Ah, me (deprecatingly), how silly I am growing! Katherine, I verily believe you are merging into your second childhood. Think of your descending from your pedestal to turn your thoughts to dark orbs and a fine face!”

Kitty’s dreams were not thus haunted; instead of the dark orbs and the fine face, she beheld a woman with light hair and blue eyes—a woman who bore in her faded face a look of hatred, as she leaned far over the bed and unsheathed a long bright dagger.

The girl awoke with a cry of terror, only to find the sun shining brightly in at her window, and the birds singing gaily amid the ivy branches outside.

“How real it seemed!” she exclaimed; “and how very glad I am that it was all a dream.”

CHAPTER XIV.

SECRETS OF THE GOLDEN CROSS.

Vengeance is still alive; from her dark covert,
With all her snakes erect upon her breast,
She stalks in view, and fires me with her charms.

—*Young's Revenge.*

A CAB drew up before the Golden Cross (a dingy little inn in one of the most obscure streets of the village of Bradleigh, Lincolnshire, England), and a stranger alighted, who, upon seeing the cabman and securing a light valise, made his way into the ill-kept public room. The landlord—an old man, past eighty—came limping forward to receive his guest. His face expressed great surprise; for the inn had long since fallen from its high estate, and was now known only as a place frequented by drovers, or the servants of the neighboring nobility. They sometimes stopped to quaff a tumbler of ale, or take a hand at poker of a winter's eve.

“You're welcome, sir,” said the landlord in a creaky voice, which resembled the sound of an old door swinging on its rusty hinges; “and you couldn't ha' done better than to come to the Golden Cross. She's bin in running order these fifty years, sir, and it hain't no ways likely she's goin' to be put down by upstarts like that yonder”—pointing with his lean fore-

finger to a modern and more pretentious inn. "Here, sir, is where you get your old customs ; and them's the only customs that stand for aught in my eyes. What do we care, sir, for new-fangled ways ? "

"Nothing, friend," said the stranger. "You and I are long past that. Let young heads take to new ways ; we'll keep to the old. Meanwhile, I'm tired and hungry ; can you give me something to eat, and make ready a bed for the night ? "

"Yes, yes," said the landlord, heartily. "I'll call Matilda. The old woman ain't as she once was ; but she'll serve you better than many a younger lass, I'll warrant."

The stranger nodded his approval to this, and the old man hobbled away chuckling to himself.

Left alone, he looked keenly about him. "It has not changed," he muttered. "It was behind that very door, that I listened to them, talking together. Ah, my lady, you deemed yourself safe then ; you wotted not that even walls may have ears. He is dead now — him you wronged so long ago ; but I live, my lady ; *I* live to avenge him ! "

The sound of a crutch on the brick floor roused the stranger from his reverie.

"A fair day to you, sir," called out the little old landlady, in the shrillest of tones. "How can I serve ye ? "

"With something to eat, my good woman, and a bed for the night"

The landlady drew her husband aside and conferred earnestly with him. At last the old man approached

the stranger, looking very shame-faced, and said, hesitatingly : "The Golden Cross ain't at her better, sir. She'd so many last week day, that the old woman says the larder's cleaned."

"And you wish to replenish it," said the stranger, handing him a sovereign. "Go and buy enough for me and yourself, too."

"A fine gentleman! one of the real old English stock," said the old couple to themselves, as they hobbled away as fast as their rheumatic limbs would carry them, to do his bidding.

After the stranger had partaken of his meal, he inquired of the landlord "if a certain lawyer, named Martins, could be found in the village?"

"Yes," replied the old man, "you'll see his sign from yonder corner."

Mr. Martins was busy among his papers when a knock sounded at the outer door, and presently his clerk announced a gentleman wishing to see him upon private business.

"Show him in," commanded the lawyer.

"I am here," said a voice, and the stranger pushed open the door and stood upon the threshold, gazing earnestly at the lawyer, who had gotten down from his high stool and was advancing to meet him.

"Don't you know me, Martins?" he asked, presently.

"My God!" gasped the lawyer, "can it be you, John Silvester?"

"Yes, it is I, sure enough. Did you think me dead, that you stare so?"

“Where — where is *he*?” faltered Martins.

“Dead; else I should not be here. While he lived, I remained faithful to him; and now that he is gone, I have come to revenge him.”

“What can you do?” said the lawyer, slowly.

“What can I do? ha, ha!” laughed the stranger, wildly. “What can I do, Samuel Martins? Expose all! Ah, I have come this time with a purpose that bodes no good to the woman who ruined Lawrence Reynolds’ life! I have come to humble her proud head in the very dust.”

“Speak low, Silvester,” whispered the lawyer. “Did you not know that the boy heirs Grantly Manor? If you bring ruin upon the mother, you cast him out of his inheritance.”

“Which is an unlawful inheritance,” said the stranger, sternly. “Wrong has gone on long enough, I tell you, Samuel Martins! Even this boy must suffer.”

“Where are your proofs?”

“In your possession. Listen, Martins! One night, long ago, I overheard you, plotting with my lady, at the inn of the Golden Cross. You thought yourselves safe; but I was hid behind the inner door, and saw and heard all. You showed her papers, and she paid you the price of your silence. You shall now deliver up those papers to me.”

“And what, if I refuse?”

“You dare not. Have you forgotten, Samuel Martins, that one word from me — one word, spoken as to the murder of John Bodie, would find you in

prison, under the very shadow of the gallows? Dare you defy my power?"

The lawyer turned a sickly white, and would have fallen, had not the stranger caught him by the shoulder and shook him roughly.

"Tush! man," he said, sternly, "only obey me, and you have nothing to fear. What was the man you murdered so long ago, to me? I but reminded you of him, that you might know I was not to be put off. Bring me the papers!"

With a hand that still trembled, the lawyer unlocked his private secretary, and taking from a secret drawer a roll of papers, handed them to the stranger.

He unrolled them, and examined each sheet separately. "Yes, they are all here. This is her marriage certificate; and this is the date of the child's birth. Ah, Eleanore Ashley, for many a long year you have played your game well; but it is nearly at the close. Hist! Martins, how came you by these papers?"

"You remember, Silvester, the night she fled with Lord Nelson? Well, from a shadowed corner I chanced to see her enter the carriage. As she did so, something dropped to the ground and lay there, glimmering faintly in the dusky gaslight. I crossed over and picked it up. It was these papers. In her haste they had dropped unnoticed. I kept them, and a few years later they served me a good turn. I was, at that time, an insignificant young barrister; and after something happened, I was forced to flee the country. I came to England, and settled here in Bradleigh; but

I did not prosper. I had little enough to recommend me. One day, as I was lounging in front of my office, I saw my lady's carriage pass, and recognized her in it. I inquired in a careless fashion of some one standing near me, and learned that Lord Nelson Grantly had married while in Spain, and had spent a year or more in traveling, during which time a child was born, in the southern part of Italy. It was a clever story, but I saw my fortune in it. One day, I sought the manor, and intercepted my lady in her walk. At first she would not recognize me ; but I soon convinced her that I was not to be put off, and she at last promised me the interview at the Golden Cross, which you say you overheard. With money she sealed my lips, and I was at once taken into favor by Lord Nelson, as the family solicitor, and have remained so ever since."

"My lady's secrets are not immortal," muttered the stranger. "Thank you, Martins, for the papers, and good night. To-morrow I will call for further particulars."

As the outer door closed behind him, the lawyer sank into a chair, his face still of an ashen hue. "I thought," he muttered, hoarsely — "I thought he must be dead. Can the dead return? No, it is he—alive and well. Curse it!—why did I give him those papers? What could he bring against *me*, for an old murder that was forgotten long ago? I have been a fool! The secret is no longer mine, and I might have made a fortune out of it. Curse it! I say."

The "next morning," punctual, the stranger again

made his appearance in the lawyer's office. "I wish to know," he said, authoritatively, "all about the family—particularly of Lord Grantly. Does he resemble his father?"

"He is like him in every respect," said the lawyer, "and as proud as Lucifer."

"Is he married?"

"No; but report says he is soon to marry the Lady Cecilia Brandon, of Brandon Park. The two estates join, and will make a most noble property."

"When are the nuptials to take place?"

"Lord Grantly is now in America; immediately upon his return, I presume."

"Hist! Martins," whispered the stranger, his eyes lighting up fiercely; "I have it. I'll wait and pay her out *that* night—the night of her only son's marriage. When the guests are all assembled—just before the ceremony takes place—they shall hear from me. Then, my lady, *his* turn shall have come; poor, heart-broken Lawrence Reynolds' turn shall have come! Ah, that will be a gay time, a glorious time!—ha, ha, ha!" and the wild laugh again filled the office. "Good-by, Martins; adieu, dear old fellow, till *then*. Yes, till then, good-by." The stranger strode out at the door, muttering over and over again those ominous words—"till then!"

"Good God!" exclaimed the lawyer, gazing after him, "that laugh made the cold chills creep all over me. Living so long with *him* has turned his brain. And to think of the purpose he is bent upon! Yes, as surely as John Silvester lives, he will execute

that purpose. Then, woe to you, Eleanore Ashley ; woe to you, my lady, with your haughty head and high-born airs ; woe to you, who have measured the distance between us for years. I wonder, then, if you can recollect when you were only a peasant girl ? Ah, it will be a rare time !—a fine tableau !” and the lawyer rubbed his hands together, briskly, in anticipation of the scene. “ There’ll stand my lady in her fine feathers, bestowing her smiles on every side ; there’ll stand my lord, looking as proud as Lucifer, and every inch a king ; and last, but not least, the little Brandon fool, leaning upon his arm. The priest is about to begin the marriage ceremony, when behold, John Silvester enters ! Now comes the *dénouement*. Presto ! confusion reigns. My lady drops senseless upon the floor ; the bride fills the air with her screams ; while my lord, never stirring, never bowing for one instant his haughty head, seems slowly turning to stone. Ah, it will be well worth seeing ! I would not miss it—no, not for the price of my thousand pounds. Mistress Grantly shall not fail to invite *me*. ”

CHAPTER XV.

SOME AWFUL SHADOW.

O, what authority and show of truth
Can cunning sin cover itself withal !

—*Much-Ado-About-Nothing.*

WHEN is Mason coming home ? ” inquired Lady Cecilia Brandon, impatiently, as she sat opposite Lady Eleanore, in her boudoir.

“ Soon, *petite*,” answered that lady—“ soon to you. Then we shall have a grand wedding at Brandon Park—Mason has said as much.”

“ Why does he not write to me ? ”

“ Pure bashfulness, *ma chere*. In spite of his eight and twenty years, the dear boy has never been able to outgrow it. But you do not doubt that he loves you ? If you do, listen, *petite*, while I tell you what he said in his last letter to me. ‘ She must understand, mother, that I love her, and that I will gladly make her my bride the instant I have gained her *dear* consent.’ ”

Lady Cecilia’s eyes brightened. “ How good of you to tell me this, dear Lady Grantly ! ”

“ You think so, *petite*. It is all a secret, you

know. You must never breathe a word of it to Mason, or the poor *enfant* would die of mortification. Dear, dear, what a silly fellow he is!”

“Indeed, I shall never breathe a word of it for fear he will cease telling you those sweet things. Do you not think it would be quite proper, if I should write and tell him that I love him?—he seems so worried.”

“Well, hardly, my pet. Young ladies are obliged to be extremely cautious in their love affairs. I know my poor, dear boy would be delighted, and perhaps shed tears of joy over your sweet, little letter; but I fear it would not just do. It would be against the rules of society.”

“And must we always adhere to these rules?”

“Yes, *mon amie*. We women are slaves to Mrs. Grundy. It is utterly impossible for us to transgress and not pay the penalty; but if you wish to send some little message to Mason, by me, I will undertake to deliver it.”

“May I, dear Lady Grantly?—then tell him for me, not to despair—there is hope.”

“You sweet pet! how those few words will comfort the poor lonely *enfant*! Must you really go, now? Adieu, then, *chere*, until to-morrow.”

Lady Grantly watched Lady Cecilia’s pony phaeton disappear down the avenue. “Mason *must* return,” she said, impatiently. “He can not marry this girl too quickly. I feel that some awful shadow is hanging over me. Oh, God! is this secret I have

kept locked fast in my bosom so many years, to be unearthed at last?

“I will write to-day, and demand my son’s immediate presence. He will not disobey me. Only give me time to secure *his* welfare, then the worst may come.”

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BETROTHAL.

Doubt thou the stars are fire ;
Doubt that the sun doth move ;
Doubt truth to be a liar ;
But never doubt I love.

— HAMLET.

WHAT are bolts and bars to a lover—especially to such an earnest lover as Mr. Mason? Was it strange, then, that Kitty should accidentally meet him, next morning? and was it strange that these accidental meetings should continue? or that that young lady, when wandering in the park at a certain hour, should find her feet straying unconsciously towards the little cove, where a gayly-painted boat was pretty sure to be moored! No, it was not strange, although Kitty persisted in declaring it so, and always expressed, upon each occasion of these meetings, immense surprise. Poor, foolish little maiden! Mr. Mason was not so blind but he readily saw through these thinly-disguised ruses, and his hopes rose accordingly. He forgot his promise to remain silent, and upon each meeting pleaded his suit in a right royal fashion.

And what was the matter with Kitty Kaw? Why should her great, lovely eyes veil themselves beneath their white curtains, and such a deep rose-color come

into her pretty cheeks, as she listened to this young man's protestations? Ah, Eros had shot his arrow straight, and Kitty had fallen a victim.

"He is so good and noble and true," she said softly to herself, as she sauntered through the park, "and I—I love him. Oh, dear! aunt Hester is coming home to-morrow; then I can never see him again. I must tell him so to-night."

The soft gray shadows of twilight were stealing over the grasses and over the silver water of the lake, when Kitty Kaw reached the trysting place that evening. Mr. Mason, who was waiting impatiently, caught the first echo of her light foot-fall, and sprang from his boat to the bank.

"She is coming—my own, my sweet;
Were it ever so airy a tread,
My heart would hear her, and beat;
Were it earth, in an earthy bed,
My dust would hear her and beat;
Had I lain for a century dead,
Would start and tremble under her feet,
And blossom in purple and red."

"My darling!" he exclaimed, reproachfully, "you are very late."

"I could not get away," said Kitty; "Jane watched me so. I am sure she suspects something, and will tell aunt Hester when she returns to-morrow; then, Mr.—Mr. Mason, I must not see you again."

"Not see me again! that would be worse than death to me. I can not give you up, Kitty. I love you too truly."

The girl drooped her head, but did not attempt to draw away the little white hand which he held so closely in his own.

“Don’t you love me, Kitty?” he pleaded. “Will you not be my own little wife?”

There was no answer, but Mr. Mason’s arm stole about her waist, and he drew her close to him until the beautiful golden head rested upon his shoulder. Bending, he pressed one long, passionate kiss upon her lips.

“My darling,” he murmured, “say that you love me.”

A white arm stole about his neck, and Kitty Kaw whispered, ever so softly, words that have gladdened the lover’s heart from time immemorial: “I love you.”

A shower of kisses showed that these words were fully appreciated. “One thing more, darling,” he said, “and I shall be fully convinced: Kiss me.”

The trembling red lips rested upon his own for one instant — rested as lightly as the dew upon the rose; then Kitty Kaw hid her bashful face on her lover’s shoulder.

“What if I am poor, Kitty?” he asked, presently. “Can you be a poor man’s wife?”

“I never thought,” said Kitty. “Of course you are poor. Papa was poor, but mamma loved him always.”

“And are you willing to share my humble lot, dearest?”

“Yes,” she replied, earnestly, “because I love you.”

“Because I love you.” Could he have borne these words in mind ; could he only have trusted her, long years of sorrow might have been spared him.

And there they sat until the moon crept over the brow of the mountain and flung her silver trail upon the water ; then Kitty remembered that she must go home, and with a long, reluctant farewell, the lovers parted.

As the young lady walked swiftly along in the direction of the house, a figure emerged from a clump of trees near by, and followed close in her wake. It was Jane, who wore on her head the reward of her secresy, the Leghorn flat, but who was bent upon picking up a few hints to drop in Miss Hester’s ear, at the price of a new lawn.

“Lauk o’ mercy ! good land !” she exclaimed to herself, “I saw him kiss her, an’ all that love talk goin’ on ! Why, he’s wus ’an my Henry. I never see the beat ! Won’t the mistress gobble down this ! Won’t she be mad ! I expect she’ll rub her glasses clean through. And won’t Miss Kitty ketch it ! I wouldn’t be in her shoes for nothing on this airth ! Ah, I guess this fine bit’ll bring that lawn, and perhaps turn me an honest shilling. O Jane, you’re a cunning one !”

Mr. Mason, his face beaming with happiness, lit a cigar, and returning to his boat, rowed away over the lake, his oars lifting the shining water at every stroke.

“God bless her!” he said softly to himself; “how her sweet face will light up the old manor. I verily believe, even the solemn faces of the dead and gone Grantlys, hanging against the walls, will smile down on my bonnie little wife, when they hear her silvery laugh. And she loves me for myself, alone. I have won her without the aid of riches. No title has been flaunted before her eyes; but I, my humble self—a strolling artist, as perhaps she deems me—have won this peerless creature. Well, she shall not repent it. Let me see, the ogress returns to-morrow. I shall hasten to present myself. With all her Hinkley pride, I have no fear that she will look unfavorably upon a Grantly for her niece. My poor little Kitty, how she fears her; when I have disclosed my true self, all of that will be past.”

Ralph Otis was busily at work that night, when Mr. Mason entered his room.

“Congratulate me, old boy,” said the young man, going straight to his cousin’s chair; “I have won her.”

A deathly pallor overspread the artist’s face, and he bent closer over his work to hide the fierce pain that struggled for mastery.

“Won whom?” he asked faintly.

“The sweetest girl in all the world—Kitty Kaw. Oh, Ralph, old boy, you, who have never loved, can not know how I love her. Why, I would willingly, nay, gladly, lay down my life to serve her. God bless you, old fellow! I owe all my happiness to you. From the moment I read the letter, in which

you described her to me, I loved her. It was the half undefined hope that I might find her as you said, that brought me to America. I say again, God bless you!" and Mr. Mason seized Ralph Otis' hand and wrung it heartily.

"You deserve to be happy, cousin," replied the artist: "accept my sincere congratulations and best wishes for your future. She *is* a sweet girl! But leave me now; you look so insanely happy that I shall grow jealous in spite of myself."

"But I wished to talk over my plans with you, Ral."

"Not to-night, dear boy"—laying his hand with almost womanly tenderness on the young man's shoulder—"I wish to be alone. Go now, and may God bless you."

"You are not off your pins, Ral?" asked the young man, gazing anxiously into his friend's face. "You don't look as hearty as usual."

"I am all right, old fellow," he said, pushing him gently from the room. "Yes, I am all right," he repeated to himself—"all right; or I shall be as soon as I get a little used to this pain. I wish him joy. She could never have loved me; while I—it was presumptuous—but *I* loved her better than I did my own soul. God help me!"—and laying his head upon his arm, deep sobs shook his broad chest, as he mourned, alone, over the dream that was forever past.

Lord Mason, utterly unconscious of the sorrow he had awakened, whistled softly an old love tune, as he took down his writing-desk from the shelf in his room,

and selecting paper and pen proceeded to indite the following epistle to his mother—the Lady Eleanore Grantly :

MY DEAR MOTHER:

Prepare yourself for a surprise. Knowing that it has long been your earnest desire to see me happily wedded, I have at last brought myself to look upon the matter in a favorable light. In fact, I am about to be married; and—I can only use the words of the illustrious Traddles—“to the dearest girl!”

I am quite certain that in your desiring me to wed Lady Cecilia Brandon, you were actuated by the fact that she belonged to as ancient and as noble a family as our own; I therefore take pleasure in announcing to you, that you will have no cause to blush for your future daughter-in-law. Although American born, she is highly connected. Her mother was a Hinkley, of a near branch of the Hinkleys of Devonshire; who, if you will recollect, fell heir to their illustrious title (considerably prior to our own family) in the reign of Henry the Eighth. I have their genealogy complete, and will explain all satisfactorily to you upon our arrival in England.

My intended bride is without property; her mother having married a respectable gentleman, but unfortunately against her father's wishes. She was, therefore, cut off from her share of the estate, which fell entire to her only sister—Hester Hinkley—with whom my future wife—Kitty Kaw—now resides. As I have already property enough, and to spare, this fact does not weigh for a moment in the balance. I love Kitty with my whole soul, and that suffices. I hope, dear mother, that you will see as I do, and give my little wife a hearty welcome. She is motherless, and a mother's love will prove acceptable, indeed.

We shall probably return to England sometime in November. In the meanwhile, I desire that you shall refit the north rooms for her accommodation, and refurnish the whole house with whatever is needed. You can draw on Martins.

Hoping, dear mother, I shall receive your blessing soon, I remain—

Your affectionate son,

MASON GRANTLY.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE NOCTURNAL VISIT

Double, double, toil and trouble.

—MACBETH.

LADY CECILIA BRANDON had come over to Grantly Manor, for the purpose of spending a week with Lady Eleanore, whose society, owing to the general topic of conversation—"my son, Mason"—was peculiarly agreeable to the little lady.

The two were seated in Lady Eleanore's boudoir, at lunch, upon this particular morning; and my lady was in the midst of a glowing recital, pertaining to Lord Mason's deep, but hidden, affection for the Lady Cecilia, when she was interrupted by the entrance of her maid, bringing a letter.

"From Mason," said my lady, her sallow face lighting up with pleasure. "Ah, now we shall know when he really is to return. I dare say the boy is as anxious as we for that day."

She tore open the envelope hastily, and putting on her gold-bowed spectacles (merely from habit, however, for Lady Eleanore would never for a moment own that she wore them from necessity) began to read.

Suddenly she uttered a smothered exclamation of pain—the letter dropped from her nerveless hand, and my lady fell forward in a swoon.

Lady Cecilia screamed lustily for help, and commenced a fruitless chase up and down the apartment, wringing her hands in the most helpless manner. The screams, however, quickly brought Jeannette, the maid, who, displaying considerable more presence of mind, snatched up the ewer, and dashed its contents full in her mistress's face. It produced the desired effect, in spite of its diminishing very perceptibly the artificial bloom on the sallow cheeks, for with a long, shuddering sigh Lady Eleanore Grantly slowly opened her eyes.

"The letter; my letter," she whispered faintly, and would not be satisfied until it was placed safely in her hand.

"Oh, dear Lady Grantly," sobbed Lady Cecilia, "I was so frightened! Why *did* you faint? Is Mason ill? oh, do tell me!"

"No, no; Mason is well. It was only the oppressive heat of the room," faltered Lady Eleanore. "Leave me now! I wish to be alone for a little time, *petite*. My head aches sadly, and a short sleep will do me good. I shall be better soon.

Lady Cecilia obeyed reluctantly. Jeannette remained to draw the shutters, and was also dismissed.

As soon as she was fairly alone, Lady Eleanore drew her son's letter from her bosom, and read it carefully from beginning to end.

"It is true! it is true!" she moaned, flinging it passionately from her. "I did not know but I might have dreamed it! Oh, what can I do? What shall I do? If this marriage should take place, I am undone!

Who is this bold upstart that has dared to steal my son's heart? — a penniless, insignificant girl! Does *he* think that the old name of Hinkley will buy bread? Does *he* think that *it* will turn the finger of scorn from the beggar? Ah, he little knows. I tell you, he must not—he *shall* not—marry this girl! I will move heaven and earth to prevent it! How dare he dream of it when he knows my wish? when he knows that Lady Cecilia Brandon has been, and *is*, looked upon by the world, as his intended wife? Heaven only knows how I have intrigued for that ungrateful boy! how I have steeped my soul in lies, that I might forward his interests! My whole life has been one dark falsehood. I have lived in sin; I shall die in sin; and if there be a hereafter, I — O God! forgive me! — I am lost! lost! lost!

“Ah! it was only last night that I thought I saw a face among a crowd — a face that I thought dead and in the grave — the face of John Silvester. Oh, if it should be he, how can I escape him? He will hunt me down, as the thirsty blood-hound hunts down the timid, panting deer — without mercy. How can I know but he may be already on my track? If so, what hope is there for me or mine? At any moment his perfidious blow may fall. But I must think; I must plan. Perhaps once more I may escape, and with Mason safe, I can better bear the blow.”

All that afternoon Lady Eleanore sat with her chin buried in her hand, lost in deep, absorbing thought. “The north rooms fitted up!” she exclaimed at last, laughing hoarsely. “Ah, yes, my

lord ; but *not* for your now-intended bride ! Perhaps that day, should you bring her here, you would find these doors closed against you, and the keys in the hand of the rightful owner. What then, my lord ; what then ? A pretty welcome, truly, for your little bride."

In vain Lady Cecilia knocked for admittance. She put her off with, " I am tired, and do not wish to be disturbed, child." So the long Summer's afternoon drew to a close, leaving her still plotting and planning.

" There is but one person who can help me," she muttered at last ; " I must see him."

Rising wearily, she put aside her light silk robe, and donning a dark gray serge, wrapped herself in a mantle of the same color, and drawing the hood closely about her face, now pale as death, stole cautiously down the broad stair-case and out into the darkening twilight.

" If I take the path across the moor," she soliloquised, " I shall soon be there. It is lonely, I know ; but I must go. It would be dangerous to wait until morning."

Suiting the action to her words, she passed quickly down the avenue, and taking a key from her pocket, unlocked a little gate at the left of the lodge, and let herself out. Pursuing the highway for a short distance, she turned abruptly down a by-lane, and by picking her lonely way for more than a mile, through patches of wood and across the deserted moor, she came at last to a house, half hid in a dark hollow. It was as

uncanny a looking place as one would wish to see ; a long, low building, surrounded by tall pines which sighed mournfully in the evening breeze, and seemed to gather the very darkness into their midst. At the first glance, one would take the house to be uninhabited — given over to nocturnal visitors, ghosts and bats ; but emerging from a clump of pines, a solitary light gleamed from a single window. Raising the latch to the rickety door, Lady Grantly entered directly into a low, dingy room. The only occupants were an old hag, busy over a pot of herbs boiling on the fire, and a lad of fifteen, or thereabouts, conning a book by the light of a tallow-dip. Both started in amazement at her abrupt entrance. The youth rose, and bowing low, offered her his stool.

“Weel,” snapped the old hag, returning to her herbs and scarcely bestowing a look of courtesy upon her guest, “weel, what now may ye be kenting? It’s a lang time since the auld wooman’s saen ye.”

“I have been busy, mother,” said the lady, “and ony came to-night to get Douglas to do an errand for me. I wish him to drive to Bradleigh, and bring back Lawyer Martins. I must see him to-night.”

“An’ why dinna sind yer ain sarvants?” queried the old creature, in fretful tones.

“Because I did not wish them to know of this visit, mother. Don’t fret! Douglas shall be well rewarded. You don’t mind going, do you, Douglas?”

“Not I,” said the boy, thrusting back his shaggy locks and disclosing a broad forehead and fearless eye ; “I wish to go, and granny need not fret.”

“Very well; make haste, then. While he is gone, mother, you shall tell my fortune,” and taking a piece of silver from her pocket, the lady proceeded to cross the old woman’s hand.

“Weel, weel,” she muttered, rocking herself back and forth, and scanning the extended hand closely; “I see trouble, trouble, my lady, and care as dark as mony a night in thy wake. Ye’ll fall, my lady, fall, fall, by a hand ye wronged lang ago, lang ago, my lady;” and the old creature crossed herself and muttered her dismal augury over again—“ye’ll fall! fall!”

“You miserable old hag!” exclaimed Lady Eleanore, angrily snatching her hand away; “how dare you tell me your abominable lies! What, pray tell me what can befall the lawful lady of Grantly Manor? *You* can not read one phase of *my* future.”

“Only trouble, trouble, my lady,” persisted the hag.

“Hush!” said Lady Grantly—“not another word! Get out of my sight!—leave me in peace till your grandson’s return! Is it not enough, that I have time and again rewarded you, without your now showing your base ingratitude in idle tales to frighten me?”

“Ah! I see,” whispered the hag in awe-stricken tones—not paying the slightest attention to the lady’s injunction—“I see an open coffin; ’tis for thee, my lady, and trouble, trouble. God help thee!”

Lady Eleanore, fairly livid with rage, raised her hand and struck the old creature a swift blow.

“That for your impudence,” she hissed; “I hate you! I hate you! Let me out of this room or I shall die from the sight of you!” and hurrying from the apartment, she paced impatiently up and down the long porch, until the sound of wheels approaching told her that her messenger had returned.

She hastened down the steps and stood waiting in a patch of white moonlight near the gate.

The wagon stopped. “Did you bring him, Douglas?” she called out anxiously.

“I am here, madam,” said lawyer Martins, jumping from the wagon and approaching her, hat in hand.

“Come,” she said briefly, leading the way back to the house, and through the dingy room into an inner one.

“Dinna good, he an’ she,” muttered the old crone, shaking her withered fist after them; “but I’ll ken what ye’re secrets be,” and softly approaching the door, she put her ear to the keyhole and listened attentively.

The lawyer seated himself, at a sign from Lady Grantly, and waited patiently for her to make known her errand.

Taking her son’s letter from her pocket she handed it silently to him. The lawyer read it attentively by the light of the tallow-dip which they had purloined from the outer room.

“Well, my lady,” he said quietly, refolding it and handing it back.

“It must not go on!” she exclaimed, passionately.
“You must prevent it!”

“*I*, my lady; how is that possible?” said the lawyer, in well feigned surprise; “remember, I have no control over your son’s movements. I could not prevent this marriage, if I would.”

“I tell you, you *must*, and can. It is for your interest. Listen: the day that my son weds Lady Cecilia Brandon, you shall receive two thousand pounds for your services in this matter.”

The lawyer’s eyes glistened—money was his god; but a moment later they resumed their customary dullness.

“No,” he said slowly, “I can not accept your offer.”

“You utterly refuse?”

“Yes, madam, I utterly refuse.”

“I will make it four thousand pounds—even more?”

“How can this be done, madam? Were I to accept your very advantageous offer, I could only—by making certain disclosures——”

“Oh, heavens! not that,” gasped the lady. “Do you not know my son well enough, to be aware that the instant he discovered Lord Nelson was not his father, he would renounce all?”

“How then, my lady?”

“There are other ways; I have thought of them. You can write to him, that certain investments he has made have proved worthless. Represent him on the

verge of ruin; and I will join my entreaties with yours for his immediate return, and his marriage with Lady Cecilia."

"I could do that," mused the lawyer. "He has made certain investments, which, should they prove worthless, would greatly embarrass him. But all this is hazardous; I place myself liable to imprisonment upon false statement. No, my lady, I can not; and yet, should I conclude to accept your offer, I must insist upon receiving my four thousand pounds the day the marriage contract is signed."

"Why not the day after the marriage has taken place?" demanded Lady Grantly.

"I have my reasons, my lady; only on that condition will I consent to assist you in this matter."

"I promise, then."

"And if you fail to fulfill, my lady, I shall make known everything."

"I swear to fulfill to the letter."

"I must have time to think. To-morrow, my lady, I will see you again. In the meantime, I hope to have matured some plan through which we can communicate with your son with safety and effect. Good night;" and bowing low, the lawyer passed out of the room, and out of the house to where the lad was waiting to convey him back to Bradleigh.

Lady Grantly drew her mantle about her and prepared to depart.

"Here is a sovereign for Douglas," she said, laying the money with a clinking sound upon the little deal-table in the outer room.

“Are ye gaen?” muttered the old hag, raising her head a little from its bent position, and casting a look of hatred upon the lady; “weel, weel, bad luck attend ye for the fling ye gee me, and rouble, trouble!”

Across the lonely stretch of moor, Lady Grantly walked swiftly along, shuddering at the darkness, or gazing fearfully about her by the light of the faint moon-rays which now and then struggled through the clouds. As she drew near the stile—the entrance to the lane—a low, meaningless laugh broke suddenly upon her ear; and, for an instant, a man’s white face gleamed close beside hers, while a mocking voice whispered in her ear: “Lawrence! Lawrence!”

Half dead with fright, Lady Eleanore quickened her footsteps into a run—never pausing for an instant till she reached the lodge-gate and had let herself in; then sinking upon the ground, she rocked back and forth, sobbing as if her heart would break. “My God!” she moaned, “it is he! it is he!”

CHAPTER XVIII.

AUNT HESTER'S DISCOVERY.

“Take care of thyself; for the devil is unchained.”

MISS HESTER HINKLEY had returned from Boston, and Hinkley Park had once more resumed its usual regime of sternness. All surreptitious enjoyment was now a thing of the past; the annual visit to the Hub was ended, and so was the holiday for the servants at Hinkley Park.

Kitty Kaw felt a sense of oppression, as she watched the coach, containing her relative, roll slowly up the avenue. Miss Hester's visit had, outwardly, not improved her; for after the long dusty ride she was looking grimmer and sourer than ever.

“How d'ye do, Katherine?” she remarked, severely, as she alighted and offered the tips of her gloved fingers; “I hope you have not been as idle during my absence as you appear to be now. Here, Jane, take these bundles and convey them directly to my room. I want no dilatoriness about it, either.”

“Did you enjoy yourself, aunt!” asked Kitty, meekly.

“That depends,” replied Miss Hinkley. “If you refer to my having passed the time of my visit in frivolous amusement—as my misguided sister Rebec-

ea's child must—you are mistaken. Strictly attending to my duty, I can say that I enjoyed myself."

"Oh," said Kitty Kaw—not having the slightest idea what Miss Hester's duty might have consisted of.

But that lady seemed to possess a proper sense of having fulfilled it conscientiously, whatever it might have been. So Kitty was fain to be satisfied ; though she could not help thinking that, as regards to "frivolous amusements," tastes differed very materially.

"I only hope she has had as good a time as I have had," she inwardly commented.

Miss Hester, without further words, bestowed upon her niece a look of lofty scorn, and departed for her boudoir

She found Jane upon the threshold, waiting anxiously for her appearance—cunning Jane, dying to drop the premeditated hint in her mistress' ear, and eagerly expecting the forthcoming of the new lawn.

"Put down my bundles, Jane," Miss Hester commanded, "and tell me, instantly, what you are staring at."

"La ! mistress," whispered the girl, with an air of excessive mystery, "sich doings !"

"What ?" inquired that lady, sharply.

"Sich doings, mistress, as I never sec—about the young miss."

"What do you mean, Jane ?" said Miss Hester, laying aside her bonnet and facing the girl squarely.

"I won't have such actions ; tell me, immediately."

"A young man," gasped Jane, "and Miss Kitty."

“A young man and Katherine,” said Miss Hester. “Be plain, Jane.”

“And love-making.”

“And love-making,” repeated Miss Hester, as if noting it down in her memorandum. “Well?”

“And all sich,” concluded Jane.

“And all such,” continued Miss Hester. “That will do, Jane. Here is the price of the dress I promised you. Go, now, and attend to your duties.”

“And so,” said that lady to herself, as she leisurely laid aside her traveling dress and donned the inevitable black bombazine and shirred cap, “my niece, Katherine Kaw, has been amusing herself, during my absence, in making love to a young man. It is high time this matter was looked into. I will descend at once;” and taking the book of “Daily Prayer” from the shelf, Miss Hester stalked majestically down to the drawing-room.

Kitty Kaw had fished the neglected netting out from under the haircloth sofa, and was working away industriously—with a half look of conscious guilt upon her face.

“Katherine Kaw,” said Miss Hester in her severest tones, “have you conducted yourself in a religious manner, during my absence?”

“I don’t know—I hope so,” faltered Kitty.

“Have you transgressed from the usual rules, Katherine Kaw?”

“Dear me, aunt,” said Kitty, dropping her eyes in guilty confusion.

“I wish to know, Katherine, if either of those

strolling, vagabond artists have been in this park again?"

Poor Kitty wished the earth would open and swallow her up. "What should she do? What could she say?" All her happiness of the night before had fled; and under Miss Hester's stern gaze, she felt as miserable as even that lady could desire.

"Yes, aunt," she said, very slowly.

"And have *you* had any communication with them?"

"Yes, aunt."

"Katherine Kaw," and Miss Hester's voice was awful, in its deep solemnity; "you do yourself credit, as the daughter of my misguided sister, Rebecca, and Richard Kaw. I am not surprised; believe me, when I repeat—I am not surprised."

How could Kitty Kaw, with that withering glance of contempt cast full upon her, reveal the whole extent of her misdoings? Could she confess to this severe autocrat, that *she*—with the Hinkley blood flowing through her veins—had so far forgotten herself, as to set her affections upon anything so low? At that moment she heartily wished that all the Mr. Masons in the world were naught.

"Silence," continued Miss Hester, "is the sure evidence of a guilty conscience. I see, Katherine Kaw, that you have disgraced me—yes, disgraced me! It shall not occur again, however, as I shall take means to keep you within your proper bounds. You may go to your room, now, and remain until sent for."

Miss Hester having delivered these very proper remarks, opened the book of "Daily Prayer," and commenced a satisfied perusal.

Kitty obeyed with alacrity ; her own apartment, just then, was far preferable to the frigid atmosphere of the drawing-room.

"I have committed the unpardonable sin," quoth that young lady to herself, "I wonder what my punishment will be? Something exceedingly lofty, I discern from the *cat's* attitude. Well, Kitty, my child, 'forewarned is forearmed.' I won't submit to it!" she exclaimed, with sudden revulsion of feeling. "I love him and I hate her? If he should ask me to go away with him, just as mamma did with papa, I almost believe I would. Surely, nothing can be more intolerable than this life!"

When at the end of an hour Miss Hester laid down the book of "Daily Prayer," the expression on her face was anything but Christian-like, as the influence of such holy reading should tend to make it.

"I have it," she said crisply, shutting at the same time the clasp to her book with a metallic snap, "and I shall execute. I have undertaken to bring up Rebecca's child, and I *shall* do it."

Miss Hester laid her head upon her pillow that night with the feeling that she had contrived a very clever scheme ; that she had made a bold move in the field and was sure to win. She purposed immuring her pretty niece in some secluded nunnery until she should overcome her plebeian pranks and take on the characteristics of a Hinkley.

But alas ! that lady's carefully laid plans were to be scattered like chaff before the wind. She might have saved herself the trouble of lying awake and chuckling to herself over the picture of poor Kitty Kaw's chagrin at finding herself a prisoner within the walls of a gloomy convent. That young lady was much too pretty and her heart was much too fresh for such a life. Fate had ordered very differently.

Next morning, in obedience to Miss Hester's summons, Kitty appeared at the breakfast table, with eyes red and swollen from weeping. She had passed a bad night—a very bad night; her anger had gradually died out and had given place to a lonely feeling which was hard to overcome. But hope revived once more. “He said he would come to-day,” she whispered softly to herself, while her great eyes filled with a tender light that argued well for the absent lover.

It was a very silent meal, and was scarcely finished when a peal at the door-bell and soon after a summons for Miss Hester, disturbed them.

Kitty's heart beat wildly, for she more than half suspected whom “the gentleman” might be.

A very perceptible frown deepened the lines in Miss Hester's forehead and a look of cold disdain came into her face, as her eyes rested upon Mr. Mason standing just inside the drawing-room door.

“I have no wish to purchase pictures,” said that lady in her most frigid tone. “You may go,” waving her hand toward the door.

“That is not my errand, madam,” said Mr. Mason, his haughty face taking on an additional shade of haughtiness; “I came to ask the hand of your niece, Kitty Kaw, in marriage.”

Miss Hester jerked off her spectacles and wiped them fiercely—almost as if they were the just cause of her wrath; then adjusting them, she pursed up her under lip, raised both hands in mute astonishment, threw back her head, and glared for fully five minutes at the intruder.

“Are you mad?” she ejaculated at last.

“Hardly,” said Mr. Mason, with an effort restraining his desire to laugh; “I am in my right senses, madam, and I repeat that I wish to gain your consent to your niece’s marriage with me. She has already consented to be my wife.”

“It behooves me,” said Miss Hester, slowly, “to overlook your impertinence in behalf of my misguided sister Rebecca’s child. She has been foolish enough to so lower herself as her mother did before her; but I warn you, sir, not to carry your preposterous insult too far. Remember, that *I* am a Hinkley, and that Katharine Kaw is a Hinkley also. Sir, our family can trace back to my sixteenth great grandfather; and in all that time there has not been a stain upon the family escutcheon, until my misguided sister Rebecca married Richard Kaw. Do you think, then, that *I*, a Hinkley, will allow a second stain upon that escutcheon? Not that I value that fickle girl, a straw—it is our family name, sir; our honor.”

“I,” said Mr. Mason calmly, “can trace back to

my eighteenth grandfather. My late father, madam, was the twelfth Lord Grantly, of Grantly Manor, in Lincolnshire, England. At his death the title descended to me—his only child. I have the proofs and can soon convince you that my story is well authenticated."

"I have heard," said Miss Hester, not one whit disturbed by his astonishing disclosure, "of enterprising barbers suddenly becoming plethoric lords; and I doubt not such is your case. Your whole appearance, attitude, looks, stamp you instantly as a barber. Sir, your plebeian origin is too plainly ingrained in your very nature to allow the success of your charming little ruse. I will wish you good morning."

Here was a pretty case, indeed—Lord Mason Grantly taken for a barber! He, who from infancy had heard his high born looks and distinguished bearing commented upon, taken for a barber! Inwardly he was raging; outwardly he managed to retain his usual composure.

"Madam," he said, quietly, "I suppose you will not disregard the proof of what I have said. Pray examine this," and he drew forth an elegant gold watch, stamped with the Grantly seal and crest.

"Stolen proof, I dare say," said the lady, raising her eyes loftily to the ceiling. "Perhaps you *may* have been valet to some lord in your time and have decamped with his valuables. I wish I knew the noble gentleman, sir, I would have you immediately delivered to justice."

“By heaven!” exclaimed Lord Mason, losing control of himself, “if you were a man, madam, you should answer to me for these insults. I repeat again, I have proof of what I say. My cousin, Ralph Otis, will corroborate my story.”

“Your cousin, what’s-his-name, is merely an accomplice to your perfidious scheme; and anything he could say would not alter my decision in the least. You are a barber, sir, and wish to win my niece in the hope that she may inherit the Hinkley property, but you will find yourself mistaken; she will not inherit one cent, no sir, not one cent. Now leave this house, instantly, or I shall command the butler to put you out;” and having delivered this harangue, the general stood looking very stern and warlike.

There was but one thing to do; and in a fine rage my Lord Mason Grantly turned on his heel and left. His interview with the mistress of Hinkley Park had not proved a satisfactory one.

“By George!” he muttered, wrathfully, as he strode down the avenue, “she is a regular old she dragon! How I would enjoy choking her! What a hard time my poor little darling must have of it. Well, it shall not last much longer, as I will write home this very day, and before the end of two weeks I shall be able to place certain documents in Miss Hinkley’s hand which she *cannot* sneer at. Then, my darling, my love, you will be mine, indeed. I shall take you away the very hour I have proved my title.”

Your title, my lord—ah, *your* title is too like the things of this world, evanescent.

The clanging of the outer door and Miss Hester's stately tread coming through the hall, chilled Kitty Kaw to the heart. She stood with a face white from suspense as the door opened and Miss Hinkley entered the long dining-room.

"Katharine," she said, with a grim smile, "allow me to congratulate you; you have exceeded my expectations, and even out-Heroded my misguided sister Rebecca; for, while she fell in love with an artist, you have cast your affections upon a barber."

"A barber!" gasped Kitty.

"Yes," continued Miss Hester, "a lying barber; who attempts to pawn himself off as a Lord Somebody. I penetrated his disguise at once; and informed him that the farce was no longer necessary."

"You called *him* a barber!" exclaimed Kitty, her eyes flashing, "that noble gentleman—a barber! I wonder, yes, I do wonder, aunt Hester Hinkley, that he did not slap you in the face," and Kitty stepped forward, as if she more than half intended to execute the deed for him.

Miss Hester calmly put the table between herself and her refractory niece. "And that, my dear," she said, "would have been a foolish act—a very foolish act, as it would have necessitated a case of imprisonment or a fine, that would have emptied your lover's

pocket of the reward of many an enterprising shave."

"You're mean!" shrieked Kitty, now losing all control of her temper. "It is all a lie of your own fabricating! He is a noble gentleman, and I am proud to know he loves me! I return his love from my *very soul*, and I *will* marry him! I will! I will!! I will!!!

"Don't excite yourself," said Miss Hester, warming her hands before the fire; "I hardly think you will have the opportunity, as I informed him in good round terms that you were not to inherit Hinkley Park."

"Just as if he loved me for this old rubbish!" said Kitty Kaw, disdainfully. "You are mistaken, when you suppose everyone as sordid as yourself, aunt Hester."

"We shall see," replied Miss Hester, grimly.

"Yes, we shall see!" so thought Kitty, as, in the seclusion of her own room, she dashed off the following little note:

MY OWN DARLING:

I don't care what aunt Hester says; I don't care if you are a barber; I love you, and will never, never, *never* forget you!

Your own KITTY.

This epistle was hid in the oak tree near the edge of the lake, and was followed by the reply:

MY DEAR LOVE:

I shall soon claim you. I am only awaiting certain documents from England.

Your true lover,

M. S. G.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CABLEGRAM.

I am constant as the northern star;
Of whose true, fixed and resting quality
There is no fellow in the firmament.

—*Shakespeare.*

MR. MASON had just received a telegram from England.

The C. B. investment is turning out badly. Come home at once, or all will be lost.

Signed, MARTINS.

“Confound it!” exclaimed the young man, “here’s a pretty mess!”

This somewhat emphatic soliloquy was broken in upon by Mrs. Betsy Snibbs, who, at this moment, stuck her head in at the door and announced:

“A letter for you, sir.”

“From my mother,” said Mr. Mason to himself. “Perhaps this will help to explain things in general,” and he broke the seal and eagerly perused Lady Grantly’s craftily written epistle.

Not a word had my lady dropped concerning Cecilia Brandon. She was, by far, too wise for this. She urged, strongly, his return; hinted, ominously, of the C. B. investment, and ended by appealing to him to save, by every effort, the honor of the old house of Grantly. This letter arriving (as my Lady Eleanore had, purposely, intended it should,) on the very day

of the telegram, accomplished its mission, perfectly, by completely blinding Lord Mason Grantly.

He sat, for a long time, lost in deep meditation.

“I must return home,” he said, at last. “It is plain that my presence there is of vital importance ; and yet, I can not bear to leave Kitty, for however short a time. If it were only possible to take her with me, without first convincing that old Hecate of the authenticity of my title ! but, no ; it can not be. I must leave for England at once, look to my affairs there, then return and claim my bride, which shall be at the earliest possible moment.”

Having arrived at this conclusion, Mr. Mason went in search of Ralph Otis, to whom he communicated his plan. The artist agreed with him, and pronounced it the wisest course he could possibly pursue.

In the meanwhile, how fared it with Kitty Kaw ? She had not seen her lover since the abrupt upsetting of all her plans and hopes, by her cruel relative ; but several little notes had reached her in spite of Miss Hester’s vigilant eye — notes, in which Mr. Mason explained all, and assured her in the most solemn manner, of his undying love, and begged her to wait, patiently, until proof arrived from England.

These warm epistles were a source of great comfort to Kitty, until, alas, one, most unfortunately, fell into the clutches of Miss Hinkley. A scene ensued which beggars description. Miss Kaw was, finally, as a just punishment, locked fast in her room, and regaled, each day, on bread and water.

The night succeeding the day upon which Mr. Mason received the telegram, Kitty was seated by the open window in her "cell," as she mentally styled it, gazing gloomily at the moon, and wishing, in audible tones, "that she possessed a pair of wings, and could fly away to parts unknown."

Her soliloquy was interrupted by a movement in the shrubbery on the lawn, beneath her window, and a voice called, softly :

"Kitty."

"I am here," she whispered, instantly, recognizing her lover.

"Can you come down?"

"I most heartily wish I could," replied that young lady, in indignant tones; "but it is impossible. Aunt Hester has locked me in this stuffy room!"

"How dare she do it?" exclaimed Mr. Mason.

"Oh, she dare do anything—except cut my head off," said Kitty, spitefully; for since Miss Hester's onslaught on her lover, she had lost all delicacy in proclaiming her dislike, publicly, to that personage. "I suppose she intends to keep me in this room until I am an old maid, like herself."

"Do you love and trust me, Kitty?" asked Mr. Mason, somewhat abruptly.

"Indeed, I do. The idea of aunt Hester calling you a barber! Are you a barber?"

"Hardly," laughed Mr. Mason; "if I were, I should have shaved Miss Hinkley's head, on the spot, for her impudence; but, my darling, this is no

time for jest. I came, to-night, to tell you with my own lips, that I must leave you for a time. I find it necessary to return to England at once."

"Return to England?" faltered Kitty Kaw, her heart suddenly growing very heavy, while aunt Hester's prophecy intruded itself with painful obstinacy. "Was he really going to desert her?"

"Yes, only to-day I received a telegram from my lawyer, stating that my immediate presence was necessary. God only knows how I dread our separation, dearest love, for however short a time. Believe me, when I swear to return, at the earliest possible moment, to claim you for my own. Can you not trust me, Kitty? Will you not wait and remain true until my return?"

"I will," replied Kitty, her doubts instantly vanishing before this earnest declaration, "I will remain true to you. Wherever you go, my heart shall be with you."

Was it a presentiment of evil, that turned Mr. Mason's face so white, and made him cry out, in anxious, trembling tones, "Swear it, my darling, swear to remain true to me, through time and eternity; for without you, I am lost to all happiness."

Strange enough, without a moment's hesitation, the girl lifted her starry eyes toward heaven, and folding her white hands, as if in prayer, took the solemn oath upon her lips.

"I swear," she said earnestly, "to love you — to remain true to you, forever!"

The moonlight fell upon the fair face, and revealed

its childish lineaments, clothed in a resolve as strong as death.

“May God bless you, O my darling !” exclaimed the young man, brokenly.

After a fondly-spoken adieu, and a promise on Mr. Mason’s part to return within two months, the lovers parted. The young man strode away through the moonlight, and Kitty Kaw undressed and crept into bed with a saddened but hopeful heart. “Eight weeks,” she counted on her fingers, “that is not so very long.”

So thought cunning Jane, as she let herself in at a side entrance, near which she had been standing for a long time—an interested listener to the lovers’ conversation.

With nimble steps she sped up the staircase to Miss Hester’s room—even daring to awaken that personage from her hallowed slumbers, in order to communicate the astonishing news.

“So, Katherine, your barber has flown away,” sneered Miss Hester—as with her own hand she unlocked the prisoner’s door next morning ; “how *very* sad !—what an interesting interview—under the window last night !—what a pity it is the last ! You are at liberty, now, Katherine—no more danger from recreant lovers—you will never behold the barber again.”

A disdainful silence was all Kitty Kaw vouchsafed to this speech ; and Miss Hester was fain to content herself.

“Look after my interests, old boy,” said Mr. Mason, shaking Ralph Otis’ hand heartily, as they stood together upon the deck of a Cunard steamer. “Good-by ; I shall soon be back.”

CHAPTER XX.

THE IRATE LORD.

“One sole desire, one passion now remains,
To keep life's fever still within the veins.
Vengeance! dire vengeance on the wretch who cast
O'er him that ruinous blast.”

A MOMENT with you, Mr. Martins,” said John Silvester—looking in at the lawyer's office. “Aha! how goes it?—the young lord has returned?”

“Yes,” replied the lawyer, “and a devil's pretty mess I shall find myself in, if my lady does not take him in hand. Egad! I'd give half my years to know what she will tell him.”

“Ha, ha!” laughed Silvester; “soon for the wedding, now—soon for that, Martins—soon for the wedding.”

“Hush!” said the lawyer; “I hear a step—it is his! Hide yourself in yonder closet—quick!”

Presently the door was flung open and Lord Mason Grantly entered the room—his face dark with anger.

“How now, Martins,” he said, sternly; “how is this? How dared you send me that infernal lie? You were well aware that the investments I made had not turned out badly.”

The lawyer gazed sulkily at the intruder, but said nothing in reply.

“Come—an answer,” said Lord Mason, hotly.

“Then, my lord, because your mother wished it.”

“What trick is this!” exclaimed the young man, impatiently—“that my mother’s name should be dragged to the front? I merely wished to know *why* you sent me that infamous lie! Why, sir, I could have you imprisoned for false statement!”

“I know it, and so I told her, my lord. It is not my doings, believe me. *She* wished you home once more, and feared that nothing less than imperative business would prevail upon your coming.”

“A fine state of business,” growled Lord Mason. “It will not be well to cajole me in this way again, Martins. I’ll have done with you now,” and taking his hat he prepared to depart.

“Hold,” he said, turning suddenly; “now, that I am here, I may as well oversee certain alterations I intend having made at the manor. Engage workmen and have them sent up at once. The north rooms must be overhauled.”

“The north rooms, my lord?” said the lawyer, slyly.

“Yes, they are to be entirely refitted, as my marriage will soon take place. If it were not that I can profit in this way by my return, I would not so easily forgive the infernal trick you have played upon me, Martins.”

Saying this, Lord Mason left the room.

John Silvester emerged from the closet, his eyes

shining with excitement. "Did you heed him?" he whispered. "Soon to be married—ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, I heeded," said the lawyer; "but, John Silvester, do you not hesitate to wreak your vengeance on such an noble-hearted fellow as my lord?"

"What do I care," he replied, sternly, "as long as I can strike her? I would bow a thousand such as *he*, in the very dust, that I might have revenge.

"You ask *me* to spare—I, who have watched Lawrence Reynolds—year after year—raving, dying, in the den *she* placed him; heard him calling on her to have mercy! mercy! because he loved her. Ah, often I think of that night—long ago—when he came home to find her gone, and to see again the look of awful agony on his face, as he read her cruel letter and learned that she had deserted him forever; yes, and taking the boy with her! You should have seen it, Samuel Martins—you should have seen that look. It would have drawn tears of blood from a stone! 'Twas *then* I first dreamed of revenge.

"When the wind howled around that lonely spot, and all night long he paced up and down, up and down that cursed cell—wringing his hands and shrieking at every blast of the tempest. 'Twas then I thought of revenge. When he knelt again and begged her to pity him and not to turn coldly away. 'My darling! my darling!' he would cry, 'I love you! I am working day and night for you and the boy. I will work harder yet, that not a wish of yours may go ungratified; only, *don't* be cruel, darling! don't

be cruel ! Give me a kind word once in a while ; speak to me, my wife, speak to me, for my heart is breaking ! Oh, ' he would sob, ' that I could give her the jewels ; but I can not—I can not ! Eleanore, Eleanore, don't turn away from me—don't look that way, my darling ! ' Oh, God ! ' t was then I thought of revenge.

“ ‘ I am so tired, ’ he would often say, fancying that he had but just come home ; ‘ it is past two now and Eleanore not yet returned. Oh, I am so tired ! My head aches from the figures—I am dizzy. If my darling was only here to bathe it, and say a kind word to me—but no, she is at the ball. Let her enjoy herself. I wonder if I can get that money for her to-morrow ? I must to work, not to bed. She wishes money, and I—I *must* get it. ’

“ Ah, Samuel Martins, do you think when I heard all this year after year, and saw Lawrence Reynolds dying, I did not think of revenge ? Do you think when I smoothed that coffin pillow and laid that poor, pinched, sorrow-stricken face upon it, I did not remember when he was a proud and noble-hearted youth with life bright before him, and how this woman's cursed hand struck him down. Ah, did I not think of revenge ? Revenge ! I will have it ! Revenge ! the word is sweet to me. Not to save the life of the whole universe would I stay my hand. Ah, Eleanore Ashley, you fiend in woman's form ! I will hunt you down, and deal with you as *you* have dealt by the dead. Oh God, I only ask one boon at Thy hands—give me *revenge* ! ”

“Heaven defend us !” muttered the lawyer ; “ he is mad. Nothing will stay his relentless hand. I fear him, myself.”

“The wedding, Martins,” chuckled Silvester, suddenly relapsing into his former mood, “ha, ha ! I must leave you now, but don’t forget, don’t forget,” and he sidled from the room, leaving the lawyer to meditate upon his strange words.

In the meantime my Lord Mason had reached the Manor. Lady Grantly watched him drive swiftly up the avenue, and prepared to descend and encounter the worst. She had not met him yet, as he had arrived at a late hour the night before and had risen early that morning and driven to Bradleigh.

But my lord was not to appear very formidable ; although angry at the ruse, he was not irredeemably so. Upon mature deliberation the matter had presented itself to him in a more favorable light. His return to England, he reasoned, would enable him to collect the necessary proofs to convince the obdurate Miss Hester, and also to overlook with his own eyes the refitting of the north rooms for his bride. Again, should his mother prove obstinate, personal persuasion was so much better than written—on the whole it was well that he had returned ; so my lady encountered a rather good-natured face as she hesitatingly entered the drawing-room.

“My son ! my son !” she exclaimed, throwing her arms about his neck and kissing him, “oh, I am so delighted !”

“Are you, indeed, mother?” said Lord Mason,

sarcastically; "but pray, before further remarks of the kind, explain this exceedingly interesting ruse that has been practised to bring me home."

"My son, I was so lonely, and—and that vulgar girl."

"Of whom are you speaking?" asked Lord Mason, frigidly.

"Of that creature who has dared to win your heart. My son, my son, how could you so far forget yourself and—the Lady Cecilia?"

"Mother," said Lord Mason, sternly, "at once and for all let us drop this foolish matter. Lady Cecilia Brandon is nothing to me. Whatever you may have considered her, was merely a fabrication of your brain alone. Furthermore, I must request you, nay, I command you, never again to speak of my promised bride in the manner you have just alluded to her. I will not bear it! She is pure, lovely and true, and while I possess the power to defend her, no one shall dare to speak ill of her in my presence."

"But, Mason, you surely cannot intend to marry *her*?"

"Silence!" thundered Lord Grantly. "I marry her? Yes, gladly, quickly! She is an angel, and far too good for me. My only wonder is that she can stoop to me."

Lady Eleanore wrung her hands silently.

"It is useless to attempt to dissuade me, mother, I swear to you that I will never, never marry any other woman. So let this end all difficulty between us," and with these words Lord Mason left the room.

That very day he indited a letter to Miss Kitty Kaw, from which we give extracts:

MY DARLING:

I am safely in old England once more, but am anxiously counting the days that must elapse before I return to America. The very thought of my darling in the clutches of the dragon—I suppose you comprehend my meaning—is enough to lend me wings of love.

By-the-bye, I am having certain rooms at the Manor refitted for the reception of my little wife, and in them (is the prayer of her lover) may she spend many, many happy hours.

This epistle, which contained, by-the-way, several more pages closely written upon, was enclosed with a short note directed to “Ralph Otis, Esq.”

DEAR OLD BOY.

I arrived safely and found the investment business all a hoax to lure me back to England. I was furious at first but have cooled down considerably, and am now at work ordering the north rooms refitted for my bride, for whom I shall return as soon as possible.

I wish you would do me the favor to rummage through the writing desk, which I inadvertently left in my rooms at the Snibbs’ mansion, and send me the bundle of papers signed “S. G.” which you will find there.

I enclose a letter to Kitty. Move heaven and earth to deliver it into her hands; and thereby, eternally oblige,
M. G.

CHAPTER XXI.

A SINGULAR DREAM.

"I will solve this mystery."

IN the topmost story of the Hinkley mansion, at the farthest end of a long corridor, stood an old-fashioned desk. A desk full of pigeon-holes and odd looking drawers; a desk with a case above it stuffed with dusty books that from time to time had been removed from the library and stowed away here as rubbish.

Kitty Kaw had often looked upon this cumbrous piece of furniture, and felt a desire growing within her to explore its numerous pigeon-holes and drawers; but she had always been restrained by a curious feeling of awe. Now, she had had a strange dream — a dream which increased her former desire ten-fold. On the night previous, she had beheld her seventeen defunct grandfathers marching solemnly through the long corridor. When this supernatural procession drew near the old desk, each grandfather paused and gazed long and earnestly at it, then with a melancholy shake of his ghostly head, moved on. Three times this performance was repeated under Kitty's wondering eyes; then she awoke with a sudden start and heaved a thankful little sigh, to find herself safe in her snug bed.

The next morning, this singular dream was recalled

with all its vividness, and she at once and for all determined to search the old desk and find out, if possible, what it was that so intensely interested her dead and gone ancestors ; so when Miss Hester's coach, containing that estimable lady, who, in this comfortable fashion, always took her morning airing, rolled down the avenue, Kitty sped up the long flights of stairs, to make her discovery.

She searched long and eagerly, but nothing of importance, aside from quantities of curious old books and newspapers, could she discover.

"I declare," she exclaimed, in disgust, "those old creatures took a great deal of pains, just to peer at this rubbish. I can not see what they saw to look so wonderfully wise over, and to shake their antiquated heads in such a distracted manner."

"I know what I'll do," a new idea suddenly striking her ; "I'll go down to the very end of the corridor, and march slowly up, just as they did, and perhaps I may by chance espy the wonderful treasure."

Kitty did so, in the most solemn manner ; not that she expected to discover anything, but because it proved amusing to imitate the stately walk and gestures of the imaginary procession ; and then it helped to pass away time, which, by the way, hung somewhat heavily, nowadays, on this young lady's hands.

She repeated the process several times, gazing with the profoundest interest at the old desk. Suddenly her eye caught sight of what appeared to be a brass nail projecting from the upper part of the case.

"It was that nail," said Kitty, contemplating it

with rapture, "that beautiful brass nail ! Well, I do not intend having my—*my* slumbers disturbed by such an apparition again ; so I shall remove it. Too bad to disappoint my grandfathers in contemplating such a beautiful sight, but I really can not allow it to remain. I fear they will be forced to admire the cobwebs on the wall, or something equally charming, in lieu of this."

Procuring a chair, Kitty mounted it, and began pulling energetically at the nail. It was fast, but by pressing her thumb against it, it seemed to sink into the wood. Having made this discovery, Kitty pushed with all her strength. There was a snapping sound, like the click of a rusty lock, and behold. a drawer flew open in her very face.

"Mercy," she exclaimed, starting back in great astonishment, "who could have thought of this? a secret drawer ! I am certainly on the eve of a great discovery !"

The only object that met her eye was a paper, neatly folded and tied with red tape ; securing this, she pushed the drawer back and ran away to her own room. Once there, she hesitated. Should she open the paper? Would it be just right? She gazed at it for several moments ; then a vision of the specters' curious faces decided her, and she untied the red tape and spread the document out before her.

"The last will and testament of Madison Hinkley, Esq." Kitty read aloud :

"I, Madison Hinkley, son of Gregory Hinkley, being of sound mind, do hereby make the following

disposition of my property : I bequeath to my elder daughter, Hester Hinkley, the sum of seventy thousand, and one-half of Hinkley Park ; to my younger daughter, Rebecca, I bequeath, also, the sum of seventy thousand, and the remaining half of Hinkley Park, and I pray that she may find it in her heart to forgive my inhuman and unjust treatment of her. My soul I bequeath to God ; my body, to the dust. Amen.' Signed and witnessed by ' John Leslie ' and ' Hester Hinkley.' "

Kitty's eyes opened to their very widest extent, and she let the paper fall to the floor.

" Oh, poor mamma ! " she exclaimed, " my poor, poor mamma ! had you only known of this, you would not have died broken-hearted ! Oh, that wicked, shameless aunt Hester Hinkley ! Won't I show her this ! Oh, my poor, defrauded mamma ! That deceitful woman — won't I ? Ah, Miss Hester Hinkley, you'll see ! It will prove a sorrowful day for you, that I came to Hinkley Park ; and to think it was your much esteemed grandfathers who let the cat out of the bag ! How you do adore them ! I fear the adoration is all on *your* side. Oh, poor mamma ! "

This incoherent tirade having exhausted itself, Kitty wiped her eyes, and putting the document away for safe keeping, went out for a walk in the park.

" I am sure I have good cause to adhere to my grandfathers," she said with a laugh. " They have served me a good turn, and I am very sorry that I ever called them dried-up. I certainly never shall again. "

A low, peculiar whistle suddenly broke in upon Kitty's reverie, and looking about her beheld Ralph Otis approaching.

"Oh, Mr. Otis," she exclaimed, joyfully, "how glad I am! Have you—have you heard from him?"

"Here is a letter for you," said the artist, handing her Lord Mason's epistle. "Good morning," and before she had time to restrain him, he was gone.

Opening the little white-winged messenger, Kitty read and reread her lover's letter, her face flushing with delight.

"How happy I am!" she murmured. "I do wonder if any other girl was ever so happy?"

"It won't be worth while to quarrel with aunt Hester," she said presently, for her heart had suddenly softened toward every living thing, "I am going away so soon. Let her keep Hinkley Park, if she likes. I shall not show her the will—that is, without she provokes me to it."

CHAPTER XXII

THE DISCOVERED WILL.

O, 'tis too true!
How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience!

—*Shakespeare.*

THE morning following the receipt of Lord Grantly's letter, Ralph Otis entered his cousin's lately occupied room, and began a search for the desired papers.

He found Mrs. Betsy Snibbs there before him—busily employed in dusting and putting things to right.

“La ! Mr. Otis,” she exclaimed, “but it do look lonesome here. As I was a tellin’ Polly Quackenbos some time ago, the likes of Mr. Mason hain’t found every day, and that she’d better set her cap for him. He, he, he ! Polly ’d make a good housekeeper.”

Mr. Otis replied, absently, “that he presumed she would.”

“Do you think he’ll come back ?” continued Mrs. Betsy ; “for, if I thought it all likely, I wouldn’t shet up this chamber. Jest think on it, Mr. Otis, he was the first one what slept in this room since Sairy Ann Comfort died in that very bed. They do say bad luck allers follows them that sleep first in a bed where some one has died. But la ! I don’t believe in signs, do you ?”

Scarcely heeding this interesting conversation, the artist busily sorted the papers in the writing desk. Presently something slid from between the leaves of a letter which he held in his hand, and dropped upon the floor.

Mrs. Betsy, always on the alert, stepped forward and picked it up. As she examined it a look of amazement came into her face.

“Land to gracious !” she gasped—“if this hain’t a pictur of Kitty Kaw’s pa—the man what married Rebecca Hinkley ! Where did you git it ? Land, what a start it gin me !”

“What do you mean ?” said Ralph Otis, taking a small ambrotype from her hand ; “this is certainly not Richard Kaw, but Richard Grandale, the missing heir of Castle Vale. Mason showed it to me soon after his arrival here. He intended sending it to his lawyer ; but, in his careless fashion, has thrown it into the desk and forgotten it.”

“Richard Grandtale !” sniffed Mrs. Betsy—mistaking the name—“I tell you, it’s Kitty Kaw’s pa. Hain’t I seen him with my own eyes hundreds of times ?”

“It can not be,” said Mr. Otis—“you are mistaken.”

Mrs. Betsy deigned no reply to this ; but left the room, and presently returned, accompanied by Polly Quackenbos.

“Polly,” she said, taking up the ambrotype and handing it to her friend, “who is that ?”

“Richard Kaw!” exclaimed the spinster, involuntarily. “Where did you get it?”

Ralph Otis was puzzled. “Can this be possible?” he muttered to himself.

“Do you think,” he asked, turning to Mrs. Betsy, “that Miss Kaw would remember her father?”

“La, yes,” replied that lady; “she must have been, from all I’ve heerd, quite a slip of a girl when he died.”

The artist determined to find out for himself; so, putting on his straw hat, he set out immediately for Hinkley Park.

The day had considerably lengthened before an opportunity of seeing Kitty presented itself. At last, however, he caught a glimpse of her white dress, and heard her sweet voice humming a love song, as she came, sauntering along through the park.

“Miss Kaw!” he exclaimed, stepping quickly forward.

“Mr. Otis!” returned Kitty, reaching out both hands; “I am so glad!”

“We may be interrupted at any moment,” said the young man, hurriedly; “so I will do my errand at once. Do you recognize this?” and he handed the ambrotype to Kitty.

A low cry of delight broke from the little lady’s lips. “Papa—my dear papa!” she exclaimed. “Oh, where did you get *this*, Mr. Otis?”

But Mr. Otis had no time to reply; for from be-

hind a tree, close by, stepped Miss Hester's majestic form.

"A pretty situation, indeed!" she remarked, rubbing her spectacles very hard, and glaring at Mr. Otis through them; "I thought I ordered you off these premises once, sir."

"Oh, do hush, aunt Hester!" pleaded Kitty; "he only came to show me *this*."

Miss Hester's curiosity, for once, must have gotten the mastery of her, for she took the ambrotype from her niece's hand and gazed at it. "Richard Kaw!" she said with a start.

"Then you, also, recognize him, madam?"

"Yes, sir; I recognize the lineaments of my misguided sister Rebecca's plebeian husband; and from the coarseness of your appearance, and by your detestable arrogance, I should stamp you as a relative of his."

"I most devoutly wish I were, madam," replied Mr. Otis; "but such is not the case."

"At least," said Miss Hester, "you are typical of the class he belonged to. I will give you just five minutes in which to leave this park; if you are not out of sight by that time my servant shall be called upon to assist you."

"Return me the miniature, if you please, madam, and I will comply at once with your delicately-worded and most lady-like request."

Miss Hester flung the ambrotype from her as if it had been a viper.

Mr. Otis calmly picked it up, and raising his hat to Miss Kitty, who stood speechless from rage, walked leisurely away.

“Go to the house,” commanded Miss Hester, turning to her niece and pointing majestically with a very long forefinger toward Hinkley Hall.

Kitty Kaw could have crushed Miss Hester under her very feet, had it been possible, such was her righteous indignation. As it was, she stood perfectly still, striving to collect appropriate words in which to express herself.

“Go to the house,” repeated Miss Hester, in still more majestic tones.

She did not seem to hear.

Miss Hester calmly turned about, and grasping one of Kitty’s pearly little ears between her thumb and forefinger, essayed to urge her obdurate relative on.

Kitty drew resolutely back—Miss Hester drew resolutely forward.

The young lady was in imminent danger of losing an ear.

“How dare you!” she gasped.

“How dare I?” said Miss Hester, pulling a trifle harder, “really that is a curious question.”

Now Kitty decidedly objected to this sort of treatment; and so, instead of adopting the biblical doctrine and meekly offering the other ear for Miss Hester to pull, she determined to give that spinster (vulgarly expressing it) “as good as she sent.” Therefore, when, a second time, Miss Hester drew reso-

lutely forward, Kitty suddenly changed her tactics and followed suit. Coming alongside her relative, she—ah, that I should be forced to record so naughty an act—she raised one little, white hand and slapped that lady full in the face.

Had a raging volcano suddenly sprung up in the park, Miss Hester could not have been more surprised. Half stunned, she let go her niece's ear and stepped back. Kitty improved this opportunity by retiring to a safe distance.

"You vile creature!" exclaimed Miss Hester, hoarsely; "you low-born thing! I *shall subdue* you yet."

"I am not afraid of it," replied Kitty, sarcastically. "I am not so easy to subdue as you think for, aunt Hester Hinkley. If I am a plebeian Kaw, I possess Hinkley blood enough to retaliate when an insult is offered me. I will return to the house, now, of my own accord; and to-morrow I shall convince you that our little game is over, and that *I* hold the winning card. If you had preserved but common civility toward me, madam, I should have spared you this; but now, my poor defrauded mother's wrongs shall be righted. You surely have not forgotten the will of Madison Hinkley—his last will, I refer to, made upon his death-bed?"

Having delivered this parting shot, Kitty Kaw walked majestically in the direction of the house, leaving Miss Hester to digest her wrath as best she might.

“Can it be possible,” said that lady—a look of terror dawning up her face—“can it be possible that she has discovered the will? But no, it can not be. No one knows of the drawer save myself; still I will look to-night and be satisfied.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE GHOST.

And what art thou ? I know, but dare not speak !

—*Shelley.*

THE clock in the hall had just struck twelve that night, when Kitty Kaw heard a step along the corridor, outside her chamber door. She was very wide awake ; and springing from her bed, opened the door slightly and peeped out.

She beheld a sight. Miss Hester, arrayed in a long night-robe, the black shirred cap replaced by a white one, that fitted very tightly to her head, carrying a lamp in one hand, was tiptoeing along in the most ludicrous fashion.

Kitty Kaw's mind instantly reverted to the subject of the will, and a mischievous thought darted through her brain.

"I'll play up the ghost," she said, with a smothered laugh. Hastily wrapping a sheet around her and shaking her yellow hair all about her face, she followed in the spinster's wake.

Up one flight of stairs and then another, strode Miss Hester, cautiously, closely shadowed by the figure in white. At last she reached the corridor, at the end of which stood the old desk.

Here she set her lamp upon the floor, and mount-

ing a chair, pressed the brass nail. The drawer flew open ; but alas ! it was empty.

Miss Hester stood gazing, horror-stricken, when suddenly a groan sounded through the corridor—a long, low groan that echoed and died away in the distance. It was followed by another and another.

Miss Hester got down from the chair and gazed about her in dismay.

At the farther end of the long corridor she could descry a figure in white. Pale, yellow hair floated about it, and its upturned face gleamed like marble in the dusky light.

Slowly it came toward her, uttering groan after groan, and wringing its white hands in the most distracted manner.

Miss Hester trembled terribly ; she had recognized the face of her dead and gone sister.

“ Rebecca,” she tried to gasp.

A hollow groan was her only answer.

“ Rebecca ! ” she gasped again.

One white hand was lifted slowly toward heaven, while the other pointed accusingly to the empty drawer.

Nearer and nearer it came, and Miss Hester, who had always ridiculed ghostly visitants, drew back in abject terror. Surely her defrauded sister had risen from the grave to haunt her.

One moment longer and that marble hand would grasp her.

With a smothered shriek of despair she eluded it and rushed down the corridor.

An audible titter broke from the ghost as it watched the vanishing form ; and picking up the discarded lamp, Kitty Kaw made her way back to her own room.

“Oh dear me !” she exclaimed, laughing hysterically, “how she did run ! Afraid of a ghost ! How very, very funny ! Kitty, my child, you have certainly, for once, conquered the *cat*.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

COUNTRESS OF CASTLE VALE.

Fudge, sir, I say fudge !
—*Goldsmith.*

MISS HESTER'S fright had unnerved her. Next morning she did not appear at the breakfast table, nor did she for three succeeding days cross the threshold of her "sanctum sanctorum."

Kitty Kaw was vastly troubled in her mind. She had no earthly desire to injure her relative in this "base, underhanded manner ;" and as a sort of peace-offering to her uneasy conscience, she resolved to make amends, by postponing all further allusions to the missing will.

The fourth morning Miss Hester sat in her usual place at the breakfast table, looking a little pale, but very calm and collected.

"I hope you find yourself better, aunt," said Kitty, in conciliatory tones.

Miss Hester bestowed upon her niece a look of quiet disdain.

The meal passed off in silence, and Kitty arose from the table, very glad to escape from such a frigid atmosphere.

Miss Hester took up the book of "Daily Prayer," which lay beside her plate, and repaired to the drawing-room.

She had scarcely seated herself, however, upon one of the stiff hair-cloth sofas, when a gentleman was announced on particular business.

“Show him in,” commanded Miss Hester, in her shortest tone ; while in her heart she registered a secret vow, to be revenged, should it prove another troublesome, strolling artist.

A very tall, spare man, dressed in a most precise fashion and carrying a huge, gold-headed cane between the thumb and first finger of his right hand, obeyed this summons.

“Ahem ! Madam,” he remarked, solemnly, “I am lawyer Blackmar, of Blackmar & Hickey, attorneys-at-law ”

Miss Hester looked surprised.

“Do I address Miss Hester Hinkley, of Hinkley Park ? ”

“You do,” replied the spinster. “Be so good, sir, as to state your business.”

“Exactly, madam; I see you are straight to the point ; I myself, am a man of few words, and will at once proceed to business. I dare say you have not forgotten it was *I* who wrote you in behalf of Katherine Kaw, your niece, at the event of her mother’s death ? ”

Miss Hester bowed stiffly.

“It seems a strange coincidence,” continued the lawyer, “that I should be called upon a second time to appear in her behalf; but through Mr. Otis—”

“Enough ! ” exclaimed Miss Hester, sharply. “I recognize that name. I will not be inveigled into

any trap laid by such a beggarly miscreant. The unprincipled villain is trying his utmost to gain the affections of my niece."

"You are mistaken, madam," said the lawyer, firmly, "and must listen to me. I came to inquire about Richard Kaw—your sister's husband."

"Ah," sniffed Miss Hester, "Richard Kaw! well what of him?"

Mr. Blackmar drew from his waistcoat pocket, note-book and pencil.

"Have you any knowledge of the said Richard Kaw's antecedents?" he inquired.

"No sir," snapped Miss Hester, "I have not; neither do I wish for any."

"That is not to the point, madam; I ask, have you any knowledge, at all, of his life before he married your sister?"

"And I repeat, sir, that I have not; and that I neither know nor care anything about Richard Kaw. The disgrace he brought upon our family name is enough for me. I shall answer no more questions concerning him."

"No more are required, madam," replied Mr. Blackmar, calmly; "only allow me to inform you that Richard Kaw is not likely to prove as obscure as you think. Several days ago, I was waited upon by an artist, named Otis, who placed in my hands a likeness of the missing Grandale heir, and who informed me that said likeness had been universally identified as Richard Kaw, and also that you, yourself, had recognized it."

“And what of that?” said Miss Hester, sharply.

“If such be the case, and the two proven identical, your niece, Miss Kaw, or the Countess of Castle Vale, as she will then be, is heir to a fine old estate and one million in gold.”

“This is folly—utter folly!” cried Miss Hester.

“That remains to be proven, madam. The executors of the will are on their way to America, and all will soon be made clear. You will be subpœnaed as an important witness in this case, Miss Hinkley. Good morning;” and gathering up his effects, lawyer Blackmar, with pompous steps, left the apartment.

Miss Hester sat bolt upright on the hair-cloth sofa, staring after his retreating figure—a very picture of amazement.

CHAPTER XXV.

“GOD PITY ME!”

“My day is closed ! The gloom of night is come !
A hopeless darkness settles o’er my fate.”

LORD MASON GRANTLY was intensely surprised at the discovery Ralph Otis had made.

“Could this be possible !” he questioned again and again. “How very, *very* strange !” But idle surmises were not to be indulged in, and he lost no time in conferring with Martins as to the best steps to be immediately taken in order to prove (for a certainty) Richard Kaw the missing Richard Grandale.

Entirely ignorant of this new turn of affairs, Lady Eleanore Grantly was, each day, growing more and more anxious. In vain did she thrust poor Lady Cecilia in her son’s way; the cold manner in which he now treated this little lady, was slowly but surely opening her eyes to the true state of affairs, and at last she refused, altogether, to come to Grantly Manor.

“Ah !” sneered my lady, as she watched the men at work upon the north tower, “you will have your trouble for your pains, my lord ; those gorgeous rooms will never be occupied by your expected bride ! I know—I feel it.”

But the work went on, in spite of her dismal

auguries, and at last the rooms were completed. Lord Mason surveyed them with great satisfaction. They were three in number, and opened into one another by arches hung with pale blue silk. Upon the floors were laid crimson velvet carpets, studded with English daisies. The windows were draped with curtains of heavy silk, of a pale blue tint, lined with white, and looped with crimson cords and tassels. The furniture was of carved ebony, upholstered in blue satin studded with English daisies. On the walls (which were also in crimson and blue,) hung beautiful paintings, in costly gold frames; bronze statuettes stood upon numerous brackets; tables of buhl and porphyry were scattered about. Everywhere was elegance combined with refined taste; even a connoisseur could have found no fault with these charmingly arranged apartments. Kitty Kaw's eyes, could she have seen them, would have danced with delight.

But as my lord gazed at them, a heavy hand seemed laid upon his heart, and a baleful voice of warning seemed to whisper in his ear, that a shadow of evil lurked close behind him.

With a sudden impulse he crossed the length of the rooms, and gazed from a window out upon the lawn beneath him. The heavy shadows of evening were fast gathering, but through the faint light he distinguished a woman's form, wrapped in a gray mantle, stealing, stealthily, down the avenue, in the direction of the north gates. At any other time, Lord Mason would have scarcely given this object a second thought; but now he looked more closely, and

recognized, in the somewhat peculiar gait, his mother, Lady Grantly.

He gave a start of surprise. "What can take her out at this time of night, dressed in such a fashion!" he exclaimed to himself.

A feeling of intense curiosity, mingled with alarm for Lady Eleanore's reason, took possession of him. Quickly descending, he threw a heavy cloak about him, and followed her.

By the time he had reached the north gate, she had disappeared; but looking down the highway, he discovered her gray figure moving, cautiously, in the shadow of some trees.

Presently, she turned from the highway into a lane, and from thence, out into the open moor. On, on they went, until, at last, a solitary light gleamed from among a cluster of dark pines.

"Mother McDonald's!" muttered Lord Mason to himself; "great heavens! my mother has gone mad, to come to this uncanny place."

He was about to speak and make himself known to her, when a singular move arrested him.

Stepping into the shadow of the trees, Lady Grantly drew, from under her mantle, a bundle, which she undid, and shook out a scarlet silk opera cloak. This done, she slipped the somber wrap from her shoulders, disclosing herself arrayed in a glistening white silk, and wrapped the scarlet cloak about her; then, as if to complete this very singular attire, she threw over her head a scarf of rare old lace.

Lord Mason was dumb, with astonishment. What

could she possibly mean? He watched her glide down the path which led to the lonely house, and silently followed.

Lady Grantly raised the latch to the rickety door, and entered.

The old crone sat before the fire, mumbling to herself; but the lad was nowhere to be seen. "Go in," she snarled, raising her head and pointing with a long, lean finger, toward the inner door; "go in, my lady, and meet your fate."

Lady Grantly paused and wrung her hands wildly.

"I can not! I can not!" she sobbed. "God help me! Oh, God help me!"

"God help thee," sneered the old creature; "this is sair time to ken a stranger. Ask the deevil; he maun help thee, Eleanore Ashley."

With a mighty effort for self-control, Lady Grantly threw open the door and entered the inner room.

A moment later, a heavy hand was laid on the old crone's shoulder, and Lord Mason, who had come in, softly, asked, in a stern voice:

"What does this mean? Where is my mother?"

A frightful leer crossed the hag's face, as she turned and recognized the young man; but she replied in a tone of abject fawning:

"Ah, my babby, is it you? and ye've coom to see yer auld nurse, who held ye in her arms, when ye were but a wee lad —"

"Hush, mother McDonald! I've no time for idle tales," said Lord Grantly. "Tell me, instantly, what brought my mother here?"

“And would ye ken?” cried the old creature, her eyes flashing with a baleful light; “secrets! secrets! She kens ’t is lonely here; and who should mother McDonald, the old nurse tell? but I mind the fling she gie me. Coom, my laddie, coom.”

Taking a rusty iron key from her pocket, she inserted it in the lock of a door at the left. It turned with a grating sound, and a moment later a dark passage was disclosed. Beckoning the young man to follow her, she groped her way down this passage. At last, they paused before what seemed a blank wall. Lord Mason uttered an exclamation of impatience; but the old creature checked him.

“Hist, ye! hist, ye!” she whispered, all the time moving one hand about. “I ken it; ah!” and with a dextrous movement, she suddenly slid back a panel in the wall.

A faint light greeted their eyes, and showed a small closet. Mother McDonald pushed the young man in ahead of her, and approaching the window through which the light was emitted, drew the curtain softly to one side. “Look,” she muttered—pointing with her long skinny finger.

Lord Mason beheld the room his mother had entered; and then he stood half petrified, gazing upon the scene before him.

Lady Grantly’s scarlet cloak had fallen from her shoulders and lay in a blood-red heap upon the floor, while she cowed in abject fear before the stern gaze of John Silvester.

“Ye did well to wear that,” he said, at last, in a

deep, sepulchral tone—pointing to the scarlet cloak. “Ye did well to wear that, for it is red, like your hands—stained in blood!”

“Oh, no, no!” cried Lady Eleanore—“not that! This is the very dress I wore and the cloak *he* wrapped about me the night he gave me into your care and bade you protect me. You loved me then. For the sake of the old time, have mercy now. Oh, John Silvester, have mercy!”

“Yes, my lady,” replied the man, “you say true. I loved you then, because my friend and master loved you, and you were soon to be his wife. I would have died for you then; but now, Eleanore Ashley, *now*, I hate you! hate you! hate you! and, by the blood of the man you slew, I have vowed to be revenged.”

“John Silvester! John Silvester!” cried the lady in agonized tones, “would not Lawrence Reynolds have wished me to give to his child all that I have? Am I not making reparation to him?”

“Reparation!” sneered the man; “it comes too late. Lawrence Reynolds’ gray hair and worn, pinched face are, as you well know, under the sod. You drove him mad years ago—mad! I say—mad! Oh, would to God that you could have seen him, pacing his narrow cell day in and night out—weeks, months and years!—pressing his face to the iron bars, and calling on you to have ‘mercy, mercy!’ You ask *me* to have mercy upon *you*. You might as soon ask yonder dumb walls. If you were to pray from now till eternity I would not listen to one word.”

“God pity me !” sobbed the unhappy woman.

“Hark ye !” continued the man ; “I had my plans—I and Martins. If your son had wedded the Lady Cecilia Brandon all would have gone well. The day you would have been all smiles I should have come to dash your hopes to the ground ; I should have come to proclaim to all the world how you have palmed off your shameless lies for years and years, and held up Lawrence Reynolds’ child—your son—as the lawful heir of Grantly Manor.”

Lord Mason seemed turning to stone ; he had not the power to move a muscle.

“If not for me,” gasped Lady Eleanore, “spare my son. Lord Nelson Grantly loved the child. It was his wish that he should heir Grantly Manor. He bade me keep the secret. Oh, do not bring disgrace upon my boy’s head !”

“I wish,” replied the man, “you had a thousand sons, that I might sting you a thousand times. I would not spare one of them—no, not one !”

“Then spare Lawrence Reynolds’ son.”

John Silvester drew back and his face softened for an instant ; then it regained its hardened look, and he said : “He knows not even his father’s name. How have you taught him to revere his memory ? Ah, he would hate him now ! The long favored heir of Grantly Manor could ill brook to be called a poor man’s son. No—to-morrow, woman, the world shall know all ; you shall leave the grand home over yonder to wander as beggars. Do you hear me ?—*beggars*. You sold yourself for gold ; but you must

learn that it can take wings to itself and fly away. Ha, ha, ha! How will the world take it when it hears that it has been paying court all these years to Lord Nelson Grantly's mistress?"

At this instant a door was flung violently open, and Lord Mason, crimson with anger, strode into the room.

A shriek of despair burst from Lady Grantly's lips as she beheld him.

"What is this you have been telling my mother?" he demanded; "answer me quickly; and if you have lied, may God have mercy upon your miserable soul."

"I have not lied," returned the man, calmly; "every word I have spoken is true. You have no more right at Grantly Manor than I have. You are not the lawful son of Lord Nelson Grantly, and I can prove what I say. Here are the papers—take them and examine for yourself."

Lord Mason took them and drew near the table. With nervous haste he unfolded each one and glanced over the contents. When he had finished he was white to the very lips, which trembled as he spoke.

"You are right," he said, quietly. "I have no more claim on Grantly Manor than you. I will renounce all to-morrow. Come, mother."

Lady Grantly did not seem to hear him, but stood staring vacantly before her.

The expression on John Silvester's face softened as he gazed upon this noble young man. "You are

so like Lawrence," he said, in a pained voice, "that I can not wrong you. Keep the papers."

An exclamation of joy broke from Lady Grantly's lips at these words. "Give the papers to me, my son, give them to me!" she cried eagerly.

Lord Mason drew back. "Do you think," he said firmly, "that *I* would stoop to keep what is not rightfully my own? No—a thousand times, *no!* Grantly Manor shall be restored to its lawful heir—Ralph Otis, without delay. Had I known of this earlier, not one hour should it have remained in my possession. Tomorrow, I repeat, my mother and I will leave it forever."

"My son, my son," whispered the lady, "there is still one chance left before the world knows this—Marry the Lady Cecilia."

A look of proud scorn came into the young man's face. "You shame me, mother," he cried; "you shame me to know that I have owned you all these years. Leave me!" and he threw out his hand as if to wave her from him.

Lady Eleanore gazed at him for one instant; then with a cry of utter despair, she tottered and fell prone upon the cold stone floor.

Her son raised her quickly in his arms, but as he did so the blood oozed from her lips and trickled slowly down the white silk dress.

They laid her gently upon a couch in the outer room, and tried by every means to restore her, while Douglas was despatched for a physician. At last she

opened her eyes, and fixing them full upon her son, said faintly : “ Lawrence, forgive. I—I—” the blood choked her, and after a few frightful gasps and starts she lay dead before them.

“ A coffin for ye, my lady,” muttered the old crone, bending over her ; ” ’t is come, aye, soon.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

AUNT HINKLEY'S DISCOMFIT.

“Behold ! I have a weapon.”

IT is useless to describe in detail the investigations that followed Ralph Otis' discovery ; suffice to say, they proved satisfactory, and Richard Kaw was proven beyond a doubt to be the lost Grandale heir.

Kitty Kaw awoke one morning to find herself suddenly transformed into a person of importance—possessed of vast wealth. She could scarcely believe in this good fortune, but expected every moment to see it totter and vanish like the castles in the fairy tale.

Miss Hester Hinkley was inwardly raging, but outwardly calm. She declared “she considered the whole transaction a fraud, and that it was no more than could be expected of her misguided sister Rebecca's husband.”

In vain they tried to argue with her. She turned a deaf ear and treated all who came to Hinkley Park in a most insulting manner.

The conduct of her affectionate relative (although it was no more than she could have expected) greatly exasperated Kitty Kaw. Day after day, to be treated with such cool insolence, had gradually quieted her conscience, which had proven uneasy ever since the ghost personation. Now she was determined to be

revenged. A suddenly formed idea of arraying herself in habiliments becoming her rank and then going down to tantalize aunt Hester, had a spice of fun in it she could not resist. While on a visit to the attic one day, when Jane was putting things to rights, she had caught a peep into an old chest full of cast off garments belonging to the dead and gone Hinkleys.

“That chest contains old duds enough to deck out forty countesses,” quoth Kitty, “and I shall avail myself of some of them, now that *I* really am a countess. Ahem !”

Away she ran to the attic, where she soon found what suited her ; then returning to her room, she carefully locked the door and began an elaborate toilet.

At the end of an hour she was arrayed, if not like a countess of the period in which she flourished, in a fashion that was most becoming, and which reminded one of some beautiful old picture. Her costume consisted of a crimson satin petticoat, to be sure a little soiled, but still gorgeous, and over it a black velvet robe that trained for a yard or more behind her. A low-cut bodice and short sleeves showed her white neck and arms to wonderful advantage. Her shapely feet were encased in silk clocks and white satin sandals. About one arm she had fastened a bracelet of pearls which had belonged to “poor mamma”—as the one relic saved from her far off palmy days.

Thus arrayed, Kitty Kaw surveyed herself in the mirror.

“I look very well,” she commented, “only a

countess should never wear her hair in long strings down her back. I must manage some how ;” and snatching up a comb, she proceeded to arrange her lovely golden tresses *a la pompadour*, and fasten them in a Sappho knot low in her neck. This fashion, which certainly gave her a more imposing appearance, seemed to satisfy her, for she turned away with a nod of approval, and picking up a large feather fan which lay on the bed, went slowly down to the drawing-room.

At the foot of the grand staircase she encountered John, the old butler, who gazed at her in amazement.

“John,” she commanded in stately tones, “take this card to your mistress and say to her that a *countess* waits upon her in the drawing-room.”

Old John, with an amused smile, bowed low and departed to do her bidding.

Certainly Miss Hester must have forgotten the newly-acquired title of her niece or she would not have stayed to don her best bombazine and satin shirred cap before descending to the drawing-room. Indeed, had Miss Hester once suspected the trick that was being played upon her she would not have descended at all.

Although of a skeptical turn of mind, that lady was for once disarmed. She saw nothing fraudulent in the neatly written satin card ; but deeming that some distinguished guest had suddenly arrived from—she scarcely knew where—she took great pains with her toilet, and when she descended, John, ac-

according to orders, threw open the drawing-room doors and announced, in a pompous tone, "My lady."

When Miss Hester's eyes fell upon the countess, who had arisen at her entrance, and now stood with her chin elevated in the air, swaying her feather fan in a most stately manner, her rage was intense.

"What a fool!" she muttered to herself, and would have turned instantly back only she had an innate idea that such a proceeding would but heighten the young lady's enjoyment.

"Madam," said Kitty, in an affected tone, "the *Countess* of Castle Vale greets you."

Miss Hester took a chair and drew out her netting.

The "countess" began to pace majestically up and down the room.

Miss Hester grew exasperated. "Sit down, Katherine Kaw," she commanded.

Never by look or gesture did Kitty show that she heard her, but pausing before the glass she proceeded to arrange her train and admire herself in the most absurd fashion.

Miss Hester took off her spectacles and rubbed them ominously. She coughed and began :

"I never, in all my life, beheld such plebeian airs. They are exactly like your father's. The idea of Richard Kaw being proven a patrician, is utterly ridiculous! What has been done is false — utterly false! I warn you, Katherine Kaw, I will bear it no longer. I shall have you secluded in a nunnery, until you at least gain common sense."

"Indeed," said Kitty, blazing with sudden wrath, "I shall not give you that opportunity, as I sail for England the first of next month."

"I suppose," said Miss Hester, grimly and with mock courtesy, "that the *Countess* of Castle Vale is aware that she has not the right to leave the roof of her guardian, until she has reached her majority. Katherine, I can not allow you to go. As my misguided sister Rebecca's child, I shall endeavor to do my duty by you, and bring you up as becomes a Hinkley. If, by some strange and inexplicable manner, they have made out Richard Kaw (which I do not believe) Richard Grandale, and you the heiress of a vast estate in England, at the end of three years you will be far better able to enjoy it than now."

Kitty Kaw, in her simplicity, believed all this, and the idea of dwelling under the same roof with her detested relative, for three long years, was excessively repugnant. Was she not expecting, every day, her lover, who had promised to release her? What if aunt Hester should find it out, and confine her in that horrible dark closet in the cellar? She was capable of it. The very thought struck a chill of horror to her heart.

Miss Hester continued her taunts in the most cold-blooded manner.

At last, Kitty could bear it no longer. "I should think, aunt Hester," she said, sharply, "that you would not even dare to speak poor mamma's name! you, who have defrauded her all these years! Perhaps you are not aware that *I* hold the missing will.

which you so diligently searched for one night. The ghost you were so very much afraid of was merely myself, wrapped in a sheet. I supposed, of course, that you would penetrate the deception. ”

Miss Hester turned frightfully pale. “What do you mean?” she gasped.

“Just what I have said,” replied Kitty. “I have the missing will. I came by it through a curious dream,” and she related this dream, word for word. “Half of Hinkley Park is rightfully mine, as you well know. How dared you treat me as you have?”

Miss Hester made no reply. A baffled look had come into her face.

“Grandpa Hinkley did not disinherit poor mamma, as you have claimed, aunt Hester Hinkley. It was *you* who defrauded her of her just rights! It was *you* who let her die of a broken heart, when one word might have saved her; but *you* would not speak it. I wonder that the judgment of Heaven has not followed you. I was taken, out of charity, you pleaded. How have *I* been treated? You have ill-used me, in every way you dared. I might have loved you, but you have taught me to hate you. You, *yourself*, are to blame for all this.”

Kitty Kaw paused for breath, and turning, saw that she was alone. For the second time Miss Hester had fled from her.

An empty room is a poor companion in an argument, so Kitty was fain to desist, and seating herself in the most comfortable chair (which was still far from being comfortable), she gradually gave space for

thoughts. Like the most of young girls, these thoughts were of her lover, who was each day becoming dearer to her lonely little heart. In fancy, she pictured their glad meeting. How would he receive the wonderful news she had in store for him? or had he already learned it from Ralph Otis? She remembered how surprised she had been to learn that he was really a live lord, and was master of a grand old place across the water. It seemed exactly like a chapter out of an exciting novel; and now that she had turned out a great lady, was it not wonderful? So absorbed did she become in these pleasant reflections, that she failed to notice the entrance of the old butler.

"A letter for the countess," he said, with a quiet look of humor on his usually grave face.

Kitty's eyes shone with joy as they rested upon a foreign letter, superscribed in her lover's hand.

Left alone, she hastily broke the seal; but as she read, a low moan broke from her lips, and, slipping from the chair to her knees, she buried her head in the cushion, and burst into bitter tears.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MASON'S FAREWELL TO RALPH.

Hide not thy tears ; weep boldly, and be prond
To give the flowing virtue manly way :
'T is nature's mark, to know an honest heart by.
Shame on those breasts of stone that can not melt,
In soft adoption of another's sorrow.

—Hill.

WHILE Kitty Kaw is sobbing in this heart-broken fashion, in the great, lonely drawing-room at Hinkley Park, Ralph Otis is pacing up and down his little chamber, at Mrs. Snibbs'. In one hand he holds an open letter, and there is a deeply troubled look upon his face.

Presently, two great tears roll slowly down his manly cheeks, and he says, half audibly : “ Poor, poor Mason ! would to Heaven he had been spared this ! ”

Strange words, one would say, for a man who has suddenly found himself raised from humble circumstances to affluence—who, within a few days, has become the lord and heir of a vast estate ; but it is through the downfall of another, and Ralph Otis' noble heart is touched to the quick.

After a few more rapid turns up and down the

apartment, he reseats himself, and again unfolds his letter. It runs:

MY DEAR COUSIN:

It is an ill wind that blows nobody any good; and the discovery I have recently made, I thank God, will benefit you.

I know you will be surprised to learn that I am not Lord Nelson Grantly's son, as you have always supposed me to be; that I am not the lawful heir of Grantly Manor; that it belongs to you—every foot of it, dear old boy. God knows I would not have kept it from you, all these years, had I known. It was my mother's fault. She loved me too well; yet, I know you will forgive her, when you learn that she is dead—yes, dead from the shock of the secret being discovered. Immediately after she is buried, I shall go away. A beggar has no right to remain here. In some far-off land I hope to spend the rest of my days, and there forget I ever dreamed of what was not rightfully mine.

My—my promised bride—old fellow, I have written to her, and told her all. She is young and will soon forget me. You must comfort her. I am glad to learn that her father has been proven Richard Grandale. Beautiful Castle Vale will now be hers. Ah, it is ill-fitting that *she* should mate with a beggar.

Ralph, I have just one favor to ask of you: If—if in time to come you should ever win her for your wife, as it is right and just you should, do not give her the crimson and blue rooms that *I* fitted up for her; some others will do just as well, and I—I could not bear that she should enter them another's bride.

The deed and important papers Martins holds for you. He will explain all, in a letter he has written for your return to England. I can not.

Now, my dear old boy, good by. I may never look upon your face again, but my blessing shall always be with you and yours. With great love, I am, yours faithfully,

MASON REYNOLDS.

The new Lord Grantly's head sank upon the table near him, and great choking sobs shook his stalwart

frame. "Poor, poor boy," he said, brokenly, "how very hard to bear! Oh, why should this awful trial have come upon him! But it shall not be. I will return to England immediately. He shall not give up what has been his all these years. I will not accept the sacrifice. It is all a mistake.

"Yes, I will return to England," he repeated. "There shall be no delay. I will start to-morrow; but before I go, I must endeavor to see Mason's promised bride, and gain some word of comfort from her lips to carry to him.

"Perhaps I may meet her in the park. Once more I will defy the dragon;" and snatching up his hat, Ralph Otis left the house.

He took the by-path through woods which were thickly strewn with the fast-dying October leaves, and came at last to Mermaid Lake. Unfastening his boat, which was moored near by, he sprang into it and rowed swiftly over the water in the direction of Hinkley Park.

As he drew near the opposite shore, to his intense satisfaction he recognized a little figure, wrapped in a white shawl, sitting motionless at the foot of the great beech tree.

He softly fastened his boat, and came and stood beside her. She had not heard him, and with pain he noted the look of mute sorrow upon her face.

"Miss Grandale," he said, in a low tone.

Kitty turned quickly. "Ah, it is you," she said, sadly; "have you more to tell me!"

"You know all?" he asked.

"Yes, I know all," she replied, quietly. "Why should he have gone away. I did not say so. I have now enough for both. He does not love me."

"Not love you," replied Ralph Otis, earnestly. "Ah, you little know Mason's heart. He loves you better than he does his life."

"Then why should he leave me?" asked Kitty, sharply.

"Because he deems himself poor and disgraced. He could not wed the heiress of Castle Vale."

"I hate being an heiress!" cried Kitty, with a heart-broken little sob. "I do not care for Castle Vale. Oh, if I could only tell him that it makes no difference what I am, and that I—I love him just the same and can not be happy without him!"

"I will tell him," said the artist. "I will return immediately to England, and he shall not go away. He shall retain all his possessions. I am used to poverty. Grantly Manor has no attractions for me."

"Oh, no," replied Kitty, softly, "not that; it belongs to you and you must have it. You are by far too good."

"And who would not be good—aye, more than good—to save *you* one moment's pain," said the artist, passionately.

Kitty gazed at him in surprise. Perhaps the love he bore her revealed itself for a moment; and she dimly conceived that this grand, unselfish heart was sacrificing its greatest treasure that another might find happiness.

"*You* are more *than* good," said Kitty; "you are

brave and noble. When you see Mason, tell him that I honor him for what he has done ; and that, though he were twice a beggar, I should love him still."

With a little sigh, she reached out her white hand to the artist. "May God speed the good ship that bears you across the water," she said, earnestly.

Without one backward look, Ralph Otis turned and was gone.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

“MY BELOVED.”

“By my faith ! I am well rid of her.”

SEVERAL weeks had dragged themselves slowly by, and Kitty Kaw—or the heiress of Castle Vale, as I may now call her—was growing very pale and thin from anxiety on her lover’s account. She seemed suddenly to have been transformed into another being. She no longer sang gay little snatches of song—no longer cared to roam about the park. She had even lost all interest in standing out against Miss Hester.

And strange to say, Miss Hester, on her part, had ceased to tantalize her niece, but kept out of her way as much as possible ; or when they did meet, preserved a silence which, under the existing circumstances, was at least discreet.

The truth was, Miss Hester feared the consequences of a second outburst from her fiery young relative. The knowledge that she possessed the missing will, and might at any moment make public the fraud that all these years she had practiced, was enough to hold in bounds even *her* shrewish tongue.

But she need not have feared ; for Kitty had not once thought of the missing will, since that memorable day in the drawing-room. There it lay, neglected

in a little box on her dressing-table ; and one day when she was looking idly through her treasures, and found it gone, she hardly noted it.

When she again broached the subject of her departure for England, Miss Hester offered no objections ; and Kitty, with a more hopeful heart, made preparations to return with her newly-appointed guardian.

“I shall see him in England, and then all will be explained,” she said joyfully to herself ; “but before I go, I wish so much to receive the letter Mr. Otis promised me.”

She was not doomed to disappointment. One afternoon, as she sat reading before the grate in the drawing-room, a servant entered with a letter. She broke the seal eagerly and read :

TO THE COUNTESS OF CASTLE VALE:

DEAR LADY—I have sad news to tell you. Lord Mason is gone. He left several days before my arrival in England, and I can find no trace of him. God knows the sorrow I feel in disclosing this bitter fact to you ; and I can only say, in consolation, that I shall leave no stone unturned to find him, and induce him to return once more to his home. Hope on, then, though the clouds seem dark. I know and feel that he will return.

Yours sincerely,

RALPH OTIS.

As Kitty finished this letter, she realized how much hope she had fostered in her heart. It was all gone now. With a weary air she put aside her book and sought her own room. Throwing herself upon her bed she lay for a long time half stunned.

Poor young thing ! hers was a nature containing strong forces. She hated or loved with equal fervor ; and in her loneliness she had given all the wealth of her fresh young heart to this man, who was now a dreary exile in a far distant land.

She thought of him, weary and alone, struggling under the great burden of sorrow that had fallen to his lot. “ My beloved,” she murmured, “ I have not forgotten the vow I made you. My heart shall be always with you—in sickness, in sorrow, and afar.”

Two weeks later she sailed for England, bidding Miss Hester a long farewell

That lady gave a sigh of relief as she watched her depart. “ The will is safe,” she muttered to herself ; “ but how very near she came to ruining me. I am well rid of her.”

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE NORTH ROOMS.

View each well known scene :

Think what is now, and what hath been.

—*Scott.*

TIME alters all things ; and the three years that have passed swiftly by, have brought their changes to our heroine. Although the Kitty Kaw of other days has not entirely flown, the Countess of Castle Vale has become a woman well fitted to her noble station.

To say that she is beautiful, but poorly expresses my idea—she is superb. This bright morning you shall find her arrayed in a purple velvet riding-habit—her golden curls caught in a silken net of the same hue, and on her head a Gainsborough hat, trimmed with long-drooping ostrich plumes. She is putting the last finishing touches to her toilet, before the great mirror in her elegantly furnished dressing-room, when her maid enters and announces :

“ Lord Grantly, my lady.”

“ Very well, Lisette ; tell him that I will be down presently—and stay ; order John to saddle Black Bess for me.”

A few minutes later Kitty descends the grand staircase, her long velvet habit trailing after her, and enters the drawing-room.

At one of the large windows stands the artist—grown a trifle older, but with the same frank eyes and lovely smile.

“Ah, my Lady Kate,” he says, turning and addressing her with the ease of an old acquaintance; “you are looking wonderfully well this morning. Am I too late for our ride?”

“Not quite,” replies Kitty, smiling.

“Sir Donald and Lady Cecilia are to accompany us,” continues Lord Grantly, “and I propose that we ride to the ruined castle first, and from thence to Grantly Manor, where we shall partake of lunch. My mother is anxious to see you, and I am only too eager to find in this opportunity a favorable chance to begin (with your consent) that long-promised portrait.”

Kitty nods her assent to these proposals; and the horses being announced, the young couple mount and ride away.

For two years Ralph Otis has enjoyed in full the title of Lord Grantly. Upon his return to England he searched long and earnestly for his cousin Mason, but in vain; no trace of him could be found; so at the end of the year he yielded to the importunities of his friends and took up his residence at Grantly Manor. To say that the life of ease which he now leads is not preferable to the old life, would be untrue. Wealth holds fascinations which it is not in poor, weak human nature to resist. But Ralph Otis possesses a noble mind—one in which justice has built herself a temple. He still deeply regrets his cousin's

disappearance, and should Mason Reynolds return he would cheerfully insist, were it possible, upon abdicating in his favor.

As the young couple dashed along at a lively gallop, many heads are thrust out of cottage windows, and many comments are dropped predicting wedding-bells before Christmas.

After an hour's hard riding they arrive at Brandon Park, where they are joined by Lady Cecilia Brandon, who has consoled herself with a new lover, one who cares more for money-bags than for a pretty face, and who, having been ignominiously refused by Countess Kitty, has hastened to bestow his lacerated affections upon this little lady. They then ride directly to the ruined castle, through which they wander for a while, and finally set out for Grantly Manor. Here they are warmly welcomed by Mrs. Otis, Lord Grantly's mother, and partake of lunch, after which Lady Cecilia and her cavalier ride homeward, and Kitty remains to sit for the promised picture.

Mrs. Otis is suffering from a severe headache, and after a short time excuses herself, saying: "She presumes the young people can enjoy themselves without her," and retires to her own apartment. Lord Ralph makes hasty preparations for the sitting, but before canvas and easel are arranged to his entire satisfaction he is obliged to leave the studio to attend to his lawyer's call, and Kitty is left alone.

Within the last year she has been often at Grantly Manor, and is in the habit of wandering about at her own free will. This afternoon some strange fancy

leads her to ascend the grand staircase. Idly she saunters down one long corridor and then another, until she comes to a massive door. Without pausing to think she turns the knob and enters.

She finds herself in a lofty room, out of which two smaller rooms open by arches. The floor is covered with a crimson velvet carpet; at the windows hang curtains of pale blue silk; beautiful furniture and costly ornaments are scattered about. Suddenly she turns pale to the very lips—a thought has shot athwart her brain: “These are the north rooms—the rooms she once expected to occupy as a bride.” With eyes filled with hot tears she gazed about her—at the exquisite pictures on the walls, the bronze statuettes and costly bric-a-brac. A porphyry table attracts her attention; she approaches it, and espies upon a marble hand a tiny billet addressed “To my wife, Kitty.”

With the feeling that one touches the garments of the dead, she breaks the seal and reads:

MY PRECIOUS LITTLE WIFE:

I have prepared these rooms with loving hands, that your reception to Grantly Manor—the home of my ancestors—may be a pleasant one. My earnest prayer, darling, is, that here you may find happiness awaiting you.

Your loving husband,

MASON GRANTLY.

Oh! how bitterly she has been disappointed. She presses the letter to her lips, and with a heart-broken sob hurries away.

She finds Ralph awaiting her in the drawing-room. His face wears a deeply troubled look.

“I—I have bad news for you,” he says, with trembling lips. “Can you bear it?”

“Tell me all,” she replies, quietly.

“Martins has just received a letter from John Silvester saying that my cousin Mason is dead.”

He sprang forward and caught her in his arms, else she would have fallen to the floor.

CHAPTER XXX.

IN SICKNESS, IN SORROW.

"I have loved thee well and long."

THE dead are soon forgotten. Time obliterates the passionate sorrow we feel as we gaze into the open grave ; and like the tender grass that springs up to clothe afresh the spot of disturbed earth, so new thoughts and feelings spring up to fill the void in our hearts.

Now that Mason Reynolds was dead, Lord Ralph Grantly determined to ask Kitty to be his wife.

One night, when the soft moonlight silvered the white walls of beautiful Castle Vale, he told her his story. They stood together upon the stone balcony that overlooked the little lake within the grounds.

"I have loved you long and well," he said, earnestly. "Will you be my wife?"

She shook her head sorrowfully.

"Do not, oh, do not say no !" he pleaded. "I — I can not live without you."

"I must," she replied in a pained voice.

"But he is dead, now," urged Ralph, "and I know that he would wish it. He once told me that I should win you. Say yes, darling ! I will do all that love can do to make you happy."

Sorrow had changed Kitty. She looked into those

great, honest eyes that were gazing down upon her so tenderly, so entreatingly, and wavered. In spite of her grandeur, life was very lonely at Castle Vale, in the company of a cold, calculating guardian and his frivolous wife. Now that Mason was dead, the world seemed very barren and cold. Should she not take shelter in this great, noble heart? Why not say yes, and make him happy?

Half hesitatingly, she stretched out one white hand.

He caught it in his own, and covered it with passionate kisses.

At this act there was a perceptible rustle in the shrubbery beneath the balcony. A man stole quickly away in the deepest shadows of the trees. "My God!" he cried, "this seems more than I can bear; but it is Ralph, and he shall have her."

The betrothal of the heiress of Castle Vale to Lord Ralph Grantly soon became the talk of the whole country-side. Great preparations to celebrate the nuptials were already being made.

As Kitty watched these preparations, her heart sank within her. A haunting voice seemed whispering in her ear: "I will be true to you. My heart shall be with you — in sickness, in sorrow, and afar." Had she kept the vow?

A happy light shone in Lord Ralph's eyes as he watched, in the same way another had watched before him, the busy workmen at Grantly Manor preparing a suite of rooms for his bride.

Mason Reynolds' wish had been respected. The

ill-fated north rooms were fast locked, and on the sunniest side of the mansion four large rooms were being fitted up in blue and gold.

Every morning Lord Ralph rode to Castle Vale to greet his betrothed, carrying with him the choicest flowers the green-house afforded. Life had never seemed fairer to him. His limited vision could not discern the evil to come.

In her own good time, or in her own bad time, whichever my reader may choose to term it, stern-browed Fate comes to assert herself manager of the stage of life; and, without as much as "by your leave, sir," drops the curtain and shifts the scene.

The very day the beautiful bridal robe arrived from Paris, a soiled missive was handed to Kitty.

It ran thus :

MY DEAR KITTY KAW, THE KOUNTESS:

I suppose now you're so big an' grand, you've forgot how you used to live with me, an' talked of exporting yourself, rather than go an' live with your aunt Het. But I mene to infresh your memory; then, I've got something to rite about. It's the oddest thing, but there's a man here, awful sick, that can't talk about nothin' else but you. You just ought to hear him go on, a-calling Kitty Kaw, my darlin' Kitty, my soon-to-be little wife! I declare, if he wan't jist a dyin', I'd take him to it for his impudence! Then he'll say how he's got some north rooms fixed up awful fine for you, and that you're a-goin' to live in 'em. He thinks his name is Lord Grantly, or Rantly, I don't kno' which; an' when he came, he said t'was Reynolds. You can't never tell what notions sick folks git into their he'ds. But as I was a-tellin', all of a sudden he'll change his tune an' cry out so dretful sad that he's got to leave his home, and that he can't never marry you. It's jest awful to hear him go on. He's a powerful harnsome man—I don't believe a bit older than thirty, with great black eyes and

a gentleman's look to him; but his hair is all a turning gray. When he came here 't was black as a barber's wig; but now it's most all white. Of course you can't do nothin'; but I jist thot I'd rite an' tell you. I respect he'll be dead long before you git this letter.

After you went to England, as I was a travelin' that way I stopped off to see your aunt Het. I must say I did n't take to her much, an' that she wasn't as perlite as she might have been; in fact, she wouldn't let me set a foot in the house; an' I should n't a found out one word about you if it had n't bin I fell in with a dretful sociable woman, Mrs. Betsy Snibbs. She told me the hull tale. I never expected to rite to a live kountess, but you can't never tell what you're a comin' to. What shall I do about the man? Rite an' tell me. Yours, in respect an' love,

THE WIDOW BEALS.

Respectable Boarding-House.

“It is Mason! oh, it is Mason!” cried Kitty, as the letter dropped from her nerveless hand. “My darling, my love, I must go to you!”

CHAPTER XXXI.

MASON IS DYING.

Well—peace to thy heart, though another's it be;
And health to thy cheek, though it bloom not for me.

—*Moore.*

WITH nervous haste, Kitty snatched up a “Morning Post” that lay on the little table beside her, and ran her eyes rapidly down its columns.

She paused, and uttered an exclamation of satisfaction. By leaving on the first train that stopped at the little station near by, she could reach Liverpool in time to catch the first outward-bound steamer.

“I must go,” was the one idea that surged through her brain. “Mason is dying, and I must go to him.”

There was no time to spare. Up the grand staircase to her dressing-room she sped and began a hurried toilet.

Before her—upon the bed and upon convenient chairs—lay spread her snowy bridal robe. In her haste she scarcely saw it. Something was in her way—she dashed it ruthlessly aside. It fell to the floor, and her hurrying feet trampled upon it. Lo! it was the filmy white bridal veil.

“Mason is dying! Mason is dying!” rang all the while like funeral bells in her ears. “Would she

never be dressed !” she exclaimed, as she twisted and pulled at the buttons of her dark traveling dress. Her head seemed in a whirl of dizzy feeling—she scarcely knew what she did. Her one clear idea seemed to be to escape unhindered. “If I stop to explain,” she reasoned, “I shall miss the train, and Mason is dying.”

At last her toilet was completed. After packing a small valise with necessary articles, and replenishing her purse, she drew a thick veil over her face and stole swiftly down a back passage, and out of the grounds unobserved.

She reached the little station, which was but a half mile distant, just in time for the morning train. Entering a first-class carriage she seated herself and was whirled away.

Alas ! the bride had flown.

Late that night they reached Liverpool, and Kitty was driven aboard the steamer which was to sail very early the next morning.

Even then she seemed to have forgotten the consequences that her flight would be sure to entail. What would the world say ? How would Lord Grantly bear his disappointment ? were questions that were swallowed up in this one idea—“Mason is dying, I must go to him.”

At daybreak the steamer raised her anchor and hove away.

The long days and nights of the voyage seemed interminable to the eager girl. They gave her time for reflection, however ; and remembering what was

to have taken place, she kept wondering, vaguely—would Ralph be disappointed—very much disappointed? She dimly comprehended that he would and wrote him a little note.

Please forgive me because I ran away ; but Mason is dying, and I must go to him.

KITTY.

She mailed it by a return steamer.

One bright morning they hove in sight of New York harbor. A kind old gentleman helped the girl ashore and saw her aboard an eastern train. That night she reached Boston, and a few minutes later raised the knocker to the door of the respectable boarding-house in Norl street.

The widow Beals, herself, answered the summons ; but she did not recognize, in the beautiful woman that stood before her, the little Kitty of long ago.

“Do you not know me, Mrs. Beals?” the girl exclaimed. “I am Kitty Kaw. Oh, tell me, is he still living?”

“Lord o’ massy—the Countess!” screamed Mrs. Beals—“Kitty Kaw!”

“I received your letter,” continued the eager, trembling voice. “Oh, tell me, is Mason living? Take me to him.”

“The man, you mean,” said the widow, opening her eyes to their widest extent in her astonishment—“wal, he’s jest a-dyin’.”

“Take me to him!—oh, take me to him!” cried Kitty in piteous tones.

“Not till you’ve had your tea. It han’t proper to go into a sick room on an empty stummack,” said the widow, solemnly. “The disease might be infractious.”

“I can not wait,” cried the girl, impatiently. “He is dying, you say—let me go to him.”

The widow looked into the pale, anxious face before her and relented. “Wal, then come this way,” and she led her guest to a door at the farthest end of the long hall. “He is in there,” she said briefly.

Kitty turned the knob quickly and entered. The nurse and physician, in attendance, stared at her in astonishment, but she scarcely heeded them; her gaze was directed toward the bed, upon which lay a figure with a pale, worn face—a face that, in spite of the ravages sickness and sorrow had made—in spite of the sunken eyes and the white hair that framed it, Kitty knew to be her lover’s.

“Mason ! Mason !” she said, with a glad cry, “I have come to you, dear ; I have not forgotten ;” and sinking upon her knees beside the bed, she laid her beautiful peach-colored cheek against that poor white one, and kissed again and again the pale lips.

“He does not speak,” she sobbed, turning to the physician. “Oh, do not let him die ! Mason, Mason—my darling, don’t die !—don’t die and leave your poor little Kitty !”

Could that cry, so full of love and despair, have called the wandering soul back from the border of spirit land ! One thin, white hand was tossed restlessly above the white head—then the great somber

eyes opened and gazed full into the eager, loving face of the girl that bent above him.

“Mason,” she cried in trembling tones, “don’t you know me? I have come to you, dearest. My heart has been with you in sickness, in sorrow, and afar.”

A bright light broke suddenly over the thin, worn face. “My darling—my best beloved!” he whispered faintly. It died out and the sick man’s mind began to wander.

“Yes, Ralph shall have her,” he moaned—“he was always good and generous—the dear old boy must have her; but oh, it is hard to give up home and friends forever, and Kitty—oh, Kitty!”

“The rooms are crimson and blue—the colors which suited her best. Don’t give them to her, Ralph—I could not bear it!”

Then his thoughts would seem to wander to the battle-field, and he would say: “Put me in the front and let this poor fellow stand back. He has home and friends, and a wife; I have nothing. My life is not worth the saving. Let me stand where the danger is the thickest.”

Day after day Kitty watched beside the sick bed, until a gleam of reason came back to the poor overwrought brain.

One afternoon as she sat in her usual place, holding one of the thin, worn hands in her own, the door was swung open, and lo, her deserted lover, Lord Ralph Grantly, stood before her.

At first she scarcely recognized the pale, haggard

face and the reproachful eyes that were bent upon her.

“Forgive me !” she cried, impetuously, “I could not help it. Mason was dying. Look at him ! See the sorrow he has suffered,” and she pointed to the wasted figure upon the bed.

“My God ! can this be Mason ?” exclaimed Lord Ralph. “How changed ! how changed !”

The sick man stirred uneasily in his sleep, and muttered, “Yes, Ralph shall have her. I’m sure he always loved her. He gave her up to me in the old days. I must go away—away forever.”

“He was all alone,” sobbed Kitty, “and we thought him dead. I knew it was wrong to come, but I could not let him die all alone. Say you forgive me, Ralph ! say you forgive me !”

“I forgive you,” said Lord Grantly, gently, “but you should have told me. I would have provided company, or came with you.”

“I did not have time ; indeed, I did not,” gasped Kitty. “I had only time to catch the morning train. I suppose it was dreadful ; but oh, I can not help it.”

“He is awake,” whispered Ralph, warningly.

The sick man turned on his pillow, and his eyes wandered about the apartment until they rested upon the intruder.

“Ralph !” he exclaimed.

“Mason, dear old boy !” said the other, the tears of manly sorrow trickling down his cheeks, “God only knows how I feel to see you like this.”

“Never mind, old fellow, it is all right. Life

isn't what I thought it in the old days. You've come for Kitty ; poor, rash, little girl ! Don't blame her too much, but take her back to England with you and make her happy."

"Not until you are able to go with us, Mason," said Ralph, trying to smile gayly. "A pretty story John Silvester trumped up that you were dead. We ought to have known the fellow was crazy. Listen ! Kitty must return as your bride, not as mine. Hush ! I won't hear a word ; she has always loved you ; it was only a mistake. You will find Grantly Manor just as you left it. Come back and take your own."

"Dear noble heart !" exclaimed Kitty, catching his hands impulsively in her own, "not for the world will we accept of Grantly Manor. It is rightfully yours. Castle Vale is all Mason and I care for. You have made us so happy ! In the years to come I am sure you will find some one who is far worthier—some one whom you will love more than you ever could poor little me."

Ralph knew better. To the woman he so unselfishly relinquished to another he had given the only love his true heart would ever know.

"May God bless you both," he said, softly, laying one hand upon the gray, and the other upon the golden head.

CHAPTER XXXII.

“LOVE MADE IT SO.”

LIKE a gaily decked “warrior,” the sun arose next morning, and shone brightly into a faded room in the widow Beals’ respectable boarding-house. As it streamed resolutely through the dingy white curtains, it seemed to suspect that happiness lurked here and was resolved to brighten it.

Kitty lay asleep in the wide, old-fashioned bed; but a long, golden shaft of shining warmth fell directly across her eyes and awoke her. She looked about the shabby room, whose familiarity awakened a sense of other years. How unchanged everything was! The same old carpet, the same old chairs, the same dingy prints upon the wall. Only one thing seemed lacking—the pale, invalid face of her mother. How often she had sat beside the very bed she now occupied, and held a thin, white hand! It almost seemed to Kitty she ought to get up and prepare her mother’s breakfast. How memory bridges the years! The grave, where the dear one lay sleeping, was very green.

How well she remembered the morning the widow Beals had drawn her unwilling form through yonder door and presented her to lawyer Blackmar. With

what angry fury she had stamped upon Miss Hester Hinkley's unfeeling letter, and given away to a passion of tears. Secure in her present happiness, she could afford to feel half sorry for that tempestuous young person, and half inclined to laugh at her.

“How absurd I must have been in those days,” she said aloud.

It is so sweet to be happy—completely happy—and so rare. The girl's life, in spite of her wondrous fortune, had known much bitterness. She nestled down in the warm bed and closed her eyes in a happy dream. What need for her to stir yet? Ralph would take care of Mason—and Mason was out of danger.

How long she might have slept—what happy dreams might have visited her—is unknown. There came a loud knock outside her door, and a moment later, Mrs. Beals presented herself.

“I hope you've slept well,” remarked the loquacious widow, sinking into a chair. “That new young man was requiring about you a long time ago; but I told him I couldn't think of disturbing your repose.”

Kitty laughed—the widow still confused her words. “You may tell him I have reposed exceedingly well,” she said.

The widow Beals did not seem inclined to stir. Her eyes wandered about the apartment. “Your ma died in this room,” she said, softly.

“Yes,” said Kitty, the tears springing to her lovely eyes—“poor mamma! poor mamma!”

“I resume you didn’t expect no great luck when you left here,” continued Mrs. Beals—“never suspected to be a Countess. Wal, one never can’t tell what they’re comin’ to. I’ve said the same to myself many a time, but I don’t seem to come to nothing.”

Kitty made no reply to this remark; but lay watching, with dewy eyes, a sunbeam crawling lazily along a bar of the faded carpet.

The widow folded her plump hands, one over the other, and seemed lost in pensive thought. “Lawyer Blackmar’s gone,” she said, suddenly—“died of heart disease—dropped down dead on his partner’s doorstep, jest after he’d given them three raps of his’n.”

“Indeed!” said Kitty—a remembrance of the grim old lawyer rising before her. It must be confessed it was not a pleasant remembrance.

“I wish,” said the widow, very precipitately, “you’d tell me all about it.”

“About what?” asked Kitty.

“Why, about everything. Who that man is? How you came to come here, and what you are going to do about it?”

The widow’s curiosity had burst its confines.

A soft blush dyed Lady Kitty’s fair face. “He is my lover,” she said, “and I—I am going to marry him.”

“That’s what I thought,” exclaimed the delighted widow—“I told myself that all along. I suppose he’ll be a Count when he gits you?”

“No,” said Kitty, “he bears no title—he is only

plain Mason Reynolds ;” and her heart throbbed with joy as she recollected how easily he might have borne a title, but for honor.

“Who’s the other?” asked the widow.

“The other is Lord Ralph Grantly, of Grantly Manor, England.”

“My soul!” This ejaculation was heartfelt—it welled from the bosom of the surprised widow. “Wal,” she said, after an eloquent pause, “if you warn’t the real Kitty Kaw in spite of being a Countess, and if I hadn’t nursed your poor ma during her last illness, I really shouldn’t believe you. I’ve read in the *New York Ledger* about lords and dookes, but I never suspected to see one in the human form. I’ve always told myself, if I did come across one, I’d know him by his proud an’ lofty air; but la! this one is just like any other man—wears the same kind of clothes.”

“How did you expect a lord to look?” asked Kitty, with secret amusement.

“Why,” said the honest American “*like* a lord. I suspected he’d come riding on a milk-white charger, with an embroidered mantle around him, and a suit of white satin trimmed with gold on him; a sword by his side, and a cocked hat on his head. That seems the only proper way.”

“Then the proper way has departed from England,” laughed Kitty. “I have never met a lord thus attired.”

“Don’t you think,” said the widow, insinuatingly,

“you have made a mistake? I should have chosen the lord.”

“It was impossible,” quoth Kitty.

“Why?” asked her interlocutor.

“Love made it so.”

“Dear, dear,” remarked the widow, rising to depart, “love will go where it’s sent; but I guess”—glancing admiringly at the beautiful face—“the impossible was all on your side.”

An hour later, Kitty stood by her lover’s side.

To the man who had suffered more than the bitterness of death, she looked fairer than an angel—the one being on earth wholly desirable. He could scarcely believe in his own good fortune.

“Darling,” he whispered—pulling her down beside him—“is it true that Ralph gave you back to me, or did I only dream it?”

There was an intent look in his mournful, pain-sunken eyes, that hurt the girl.

“Yes,” she said, softly, “he gave me back to you; but, Mason, I—I never was his.”

They were quite unconscious of the figure that darkened the doorway.

When the sick man spoke there was a glad ring in his voice. “Do you mean, dearest, that you never loved Ralph?”

“Yes,” she said candidly: “I never loved him—the least little bit.”

Oh, selfish, all-absorbing love!

“Ralph is welcome to the lands and the title,”

said Mason Reynolds. “You are my portion—I am content.”

The figure in the doorway turned silently and went away. The girl’s careless, cruel words had cut home to Lord Ralph Grantly.

“So she never loved me, the least little bit,” he said, sadly, “and I—I gave her the whole wealth of my heart.”

A little later he passed the half-open door, and saw the girl sitting with her cool, slim hand locked in her lover’s. The sunlight fell down upon her golden head and touched the soft, peachy bloom of her cheek. She had lost the gay, tantalizing air of old, and in its place had come a tender sweetness, which whispered her woman’s soul was at rest.

In the eyes of Mason Reynolds dwelt the peace which passes all understanding.

Lord Ralph Grantly paused and gazed at the fair scene. To his yearning, bleeding heart, it was almost like a glimpse of Heaven itself. He might not enter. “Perhaps,” he thought, “so Divine Mercy allows each lost soul a glimpse of paradise, that a remembrance may dwell with him forever. Come what will, in their sweet content—their perfect peace—I shall not count my sacrifice in vain.”

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A VISIT TO HINKLEY PARK.

MASON REYNOLDS pleaded hard that their marriage might take place in America ; but Lady Kitty was resolute in her denial.

“No,” she said, firmly, “I must be married at beautiful Castle Vale, with my people about me. It is my home and I love it.”

“But Kitty,” pleaded her lover, “you forget ; you are marrying a beggar—one who is socially an outcast. Your splendid wedding festivities will only publish the fact the wider.”

“I don’t care,” said the maiden, with spirit—“you’re not a beggar or an outcast ; and it matters very little to me what people think. I shall never be married but once in my life, and I mean to have a good time about it. I shall make feasts and feasts and invite everybody for miles around. Not a poor person in the parish shall find himself hungry. Do you know, Mason, even when I lived at aunt Hester Hinkley’s, and was first engaged to you, I had laid my plans. Of course I supposed you poor, yet I had settled on a white wedding gown with a train to it fully two yards long. That reminds me, Mason, I should really like to visit aunt Hester.”

“Don’t put yourself in the dragon’s clutches!” cried her lover.

“Don’t be absurd,” laughed Lady Kitty. “I honestly mean I should like to go to the old place. It was very pleasant there, but for aunt Hester. I should like to take a sail on Mermaid Lake once more, and to visit the little Island. It will be several days before my guardian’s wife arrives to chaperone me back to England. In the meantime, I mean to suggest to Mrs. Beals that we pay a visit to Briartown. We can take up our abode in the village with that delightful Mrs. Snibbs. The widow says she is considerable of a woman.”

“And leave me!” cried Mason, in wild dismay.

“You can’t exist without me!” mocked Kitty. “Well, if you feel able to travel, you and Ralph might follow after us.”

“I shall feel able to travel!” said that young man, prophetically.

The widow Beals, upon learning for a certainty that a visit to Briartown would financially cost her nothing, decided that such a journey would recuperate her.

“I must profess,” she cried, “that I shall deprive great enjoyment from seeing Mrs. Betsy Snibbs. She is a very amicable woman. I can’t say as much for your aunt Het—she ain’t all I could wish her; but if I meet her, I’m determined to be as impolite as possible in my reportment towards her.”

One cloudless morning they set out, and the sun

had sunk behind the western hills when they reached Briartown. For the sake of Mrs. Grundy, Ralph and Mason, were to follow one day later.

"If ever time stands still it is in a country village," cried Kitty. "Nothing has changed an atom." So it seemed. The same lazy quietness lay upon the streets. Upon the steps to the village store sat the same old loafers—in the same old clothes—smoking the same old pipes. A yellow dog with a stubby tail came joyfully up to greet the girl. She recognized him as an old acquaintance. He belonged to the lodge-keeper at Hinkley Park.

"How d'ye, Peter," she exclaimed, and the canine lifted up his voice and howled joyfully.

Nothing else recognized her. People stared at her on every side; but none seemed to guess this was sweet Rachel Hinkley's only child.

Presently they reached Mrs. Snibbs' abode. The widow Beals applied her knuckles to a panel of the door in an energetic fashion.

Not in vain was this sound appeal. Mrs. Snibbs, herself, opened the door.

"How d'ye do, Betsy Snibbs?" cried the widow. "I've come agin."

A vigorous hand-shaking succeeded this remark.

"I never thought you'd come this way again," said Mrs. Betsy; "but I am glad to see ye."

"I s'pose you can't guess who I've brought with me?" remarked the widow.

"No, I can't," said Mrs. Snibbs, turning her astonished eyes full upon Kitty.

The widow threw out her hand elaborately. "Allow me to introduce to you the Countess of Castle Vale, her highness what used to be Kitty Kaw."

There was a moment of horrified surprise on Mrs. Betsy's part; then she fell to wildly snatching up bits of work that lay scattered about the untidy room.

"Land! land how things look!" she cried in an agony of regret; "If I'd only known you're comin', I'd had the house togged from top to bottom."

A few minutes later, a sepulchral whisper issued from another room:

"Polly Quackenbos! Polly Quackenbos! she's a real live countess! What on airth shall I dew? Run out and borry Mis' Beaver's silver spoons and the Chiny plates."

"So much for my title," laughed Kitty.

It was with a variety of emotions that Lady Kate Grandale ascended the steps to Hinkley Park mansion. Everything about her looked very familiar. Through a green vista at her left, she caught glimpses of the lake, ruffling in the passing breeze, and breaking into countless dimples where the sun struck it.

The old butler opened the ponderous door, and admitted her. His keen eye recognized her.

"You ha' coom back," he cried joyfully. "Old John ha' a glad welcome for ye."

"Not to stay," she said smilingly, "only for a little while. Do you think aunt Hester will see me, John?"

The old man scratched his head and looked down.

“I canna say, my bonnie mistress,” he replied hesitatingly, “but I’ll ha’ a word wi’ her.”

Kitty wended her way into the too familiar drawing-room. Yes—there they were—the twelve chairs—six in a row on either side of the apartment, flanked at each end by an unyielding sofa. It only needed Miss Hester in the stiff bombazine dress, with the Book of Daily Prayer in her right hand, to complete the picture. No, it needed more than this. There should be an undeveloped girl in a limp, white gown, twining her golden curls, one at a time, over her idle fingers. From this fair, yet wretched plebeian, must burst forth alternately tears and storms, in defiance of her austere relative.

As Kitty drew the picture, she could almost hear Miss Hester’s voice:

“Tears, Katherine, are the evidence of a weak mind.”

Her mind must certainly have been very weak in those days.

These thoughts were distracted by a solemn rustle outside the door. A moment later the exact prototype of her imagination entered the room. The funereal bombazine, the close-fitting shirred cap, the Book of Daily Prayer—all were here, and not a wrinkle more or less in Miss Hester’s vinegary countenance.

As she sailed majestically down the length of the long room, a feeling of alarm possessed Kitty. Had she suddenly lapsed into her insignificant girlish days? Perhaps her emancipation from aunt Hester would prove only a dream.

“How d’ye do, Katherine Kaw?” came in deep, sepulchral tones from Miss Hinkley. “You have returned to the home of your illustrious ancestors; it is well.”

“I have not come to stay,” said Kitty, well-pleased to make such an announcement.

“Your plebeian instincts,” remarked Miss Hester, “still lead you to roam. As my misguided sister Rebecca’s child, I must say I am not surprised.”

Kitty felt the old defiant feeling struggling within her.

“You could not expect me to leave my home, aunt Hester,” she said proudly.

Miss Hinkley turned down a leaf in the Book of Daily Prayer, laid that volume upon a table near her, and took up her netting.

A deep silence reigned in the old room. Miss Hester seemed lost in pious thoughts. After a long time her wandering gaze became fixed upon her fair niece.

“Katherine Kaw,” she said, in a tone whose coldness struck home to the girl, “have you any errand with me?”

There was a suspicion of triumph in Kitty’s voice.

“No,” she replied. “I only came to tell you I am going to be married, aunt Hester.”

Outwardly serene, Miss Hinkley, picked up a stitch in her netting, before enquiring:

“To whom?”

“To my lover,” said Kitty, with a wicked little

laugh. "Only think — after all these years, aunt Hester."

A dreadful instinct seemed dawning in Miss Hester's virtuous breast. For once in her life she looked surprised. "Can it be possible," she ejaculated, "you are going to wed the—the barber?"

"Even so—the barber, aunt Hester."

"A second stain upon our family escutcheon!"

Miss Hester seemed communing with her sixteen defunct grandfathers. Her face wore an expression of lively horror, indicative of the emotions of that supernatural conclave.

She took off her spectacles and rubbed them vigorously.

"Katherine Kaw," she exclaimed, "I can not allow it. The Hinkleys have always been a noble race. I can trace back to my sixteenth great grandfather, and there has never been a stain upon our family escutcheon until my misguided sister Rebecca married Richard Kaw. A wretched little ambrotype has proven your father the missing Grandale heir; how falsely, his daughter's low-born proclivities confirm. Katherine Kaw, you are a plebeian to the very marrow of your bones! I repeat, to the very marrow of your bones!"

"Thank you, aunt Hester," murmured the fair plebeian.

"If you are resolved," continued Miss Hinkley, waxing warm with her subject, "if you are resolved to wed with this low-born outcast (I am aware of his history), I command you, once and for all, to renounce

the name of Hinkley. Stain not the sacred annals of your ancestors ! Depart an ungrateful Kaw, and forever abide as one."

With the air of offended majesty, Miss Hester advanced to the half-open door. "John," she commanded, "show this person out !"

With a sigh of relief, Kitty arose and departed.

"Weel, weel," muttered the old man, "my mistress is a hard un ; but my blessings on the bonnie lassie."

Kitty did not immediately return to the village. She wandered through the park, and came upon the very boat she had so often rowed over Mermaid Lake. Springing into it, she unfastened the chain, and rowed away over the shining, rippling water. What did she care for Miss Hester Hinkley's maledictions ! Nature wore her joyous robes, and the girl's heart beat in unison with her. The air was resonant with the tuneful melody of endless birds. The sun lilted o'er the water and shivered in golden gleams. Above her was a great airy vault of blue, tapestried with drift upon drift of cumulus clouds. With cheerful caws the crows flew from the topmost branches of the trees in the park, to thieve amid the corn—gay marauders who stopped to peck derisively at the scare-crow the farmer had raised aloft. At the farther end of the lake a bed of reeds quivered and shook in the morning breeze. Somewhere amid the dense greenness a loon screamed loudly to its mate. Kitty drew in her oars, and let her boat drift in among the lily pads. She leaned over and clutched a great,

idle, white water-lily. It resisted her overtures until a fierce little tug brought its long, hollow stem reluctantly to the surface. Its fresh beauty awoke contrition in her heart. Why not have let it lain upon the bosom of the lake, to live out its short, pure life? "I will not pick another one," she said softly to herself, and rowed away.

After her long confinement and anxious watching, the fresh air was like new wine in the girl's veins. She turned her delighted eyes about her—beauty on every side!—the woods, the hills, the sparkling water, the tender slope of green banks; above her, the azure sky and drift upon drift of cumulus clouds.

"Oh, my dear native land," she cried, "thou art beautiful indeed! Though I leave thee, I shall love thee still!"

She splashed her dripping oars into the water until they shed countless diamond spray, and lifting up her fresh young voice, sang:

I cuist my line in Largo Bay,
 And fishes—I caught nine;
 They're three to roast, and three to boil,
 And three to bait the line.
 The boatie rows; the boatie rows.
 The boatie rows, indeed!
 And happy be the lot of a'
 That wish the boatie speed.

"When Jamie vowed he wad be mine,
 And wan frae me my heart,
 Oh, muckle lighter grew my creel;
 He swore we'd never part.

The boatie rows; the boatie rows;
The boatie rows fu' weel;
And muckle lighter is the lade,
When love bears up the creel.

Over the water came an echo of the refrain, in a glad tenor voice :

“And muckle lighter is the lade,
When love bears up the creel.”

Kitty rested upon her oars, and gazed curiously about her. Presently her wandering orbs discerned a masculine figure, looking strangely familiar, standing upon the beach of the little island, energetically waving a stick to which was attached a white cambric handkerchief.

A glad exclamation broke from her. Turning her boat quickly about, she made for the island—so light, it seemed to fairly fly over the limpid water. Surely, “love bore up the creel.” Her exertions appeared to meet the approbation of the masculine figure. The moment her bark grated upon the pebbly beach, he was by her side, to help her out.

“Why, Mason ! so soon !” she cried.

“We took the very next train,” admitted that young man, rather sheepishly. “I really could n’t endure it longer.”

“Where is Ralph ?” she asked.

“Sketching over yonder. You are to sit with me for an hour.”

They sat down upon the green bank, and one hour

slipped into two before the lovers began to question Lord Grantly's absence.

"We must go in search of him," said Kitty.

The girl saw him first, sitting motionless before his easel.

"Let me go to him alone, Mason," she said.

She stole softly to his side, and laid a gentle hand upon his shoulder. He did not feel it.

"Ralph," she said softly, "Ralph!"

He heard and turned a white, stricken face toward her.

"Don't! don't!" she cried out. "I am not worth it! You—you hurt me, Ralph."

"I wouldn't for the world," he said gently. "See, I am gay. I heard you singing, and I—I was only thinking a little of old times."

Great was Mrs. Snibbs' surprise, and great was her delight at beholding the two young men.

"The hours Polly and I have talked of you!" she exclaimed.

"And abused us," said Mason, quizzically.

Mrs. Snibbs looked a little guilty.

"I did hear," she began humbly—

"That I was a tonsorial artist," completed Mr. Reynolds.

"A what?"

"A barber."

"Yes," said Mrs. Snibbs, evidently ashamed of the fact

"Miss Hinkley, of Hinkley Park, kindly informed you—eh?"

“Yes.”

“You believed her?”

“Not I,” said Mrs. Betsy, indignantly. “She is a regular old scratch-cat!”

“May I ask what you did believe?”

“Wal, says I to Polly, as sure as you’re born, Polly Quackenbos, Mr. Mason is a gentleman to his very backbone.”

The young man bowed low before her.

“Thank you, Mrs. Snibbs,” he said. “It is the only title to which I can justly lay any claim.”

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE WEDDING.

IN good time Kitty's chaperone arrived — virtuous indignation written upon every lineament of her face. She said little, but in her silence one could read volumes.

“I suppose,” said Kitty, penitently, “you think I have committed the unpardonable sin, Mrs. Langdon?”

“I do not find myself competent to express an opinion upon that score, Lady Kate,” replied the chaperone, precisely. “You were born and reared in this country. What may be perfectly proper in America, is decidedly *outré* in England.”

“Well, well,” said Kitty, a little petulantly, “What's done can't be undone.”

“What shocked me most was to think you traveled without a maid,” remarked Mrs. Langdon, presently. “Who in the world did your hair?”

“I did it myself,” replied Kitty, boldly. “I never thought of having a maid until I went to England.”

“Do — do American ladies get along without maids?” asked Mrs. Langdon, in mild disapproval.

“The most of them. I believe some of them think it is very silly to be so waited upon.”

“Oh, to be sure! I forget. What is very proper in America is considered *very* improper in England. I—I think I prefer England—decidedly prefer it.”

“I don’t,” said Kitty, bluntly—native spirit rising within her. “I prefer sunshine to fog any day, and honest inquiry to egotism. If it wasn’t for Castle Vale, I should live forever in America.”

Mrs. Langdon turned the rings upon her idle fingers.

“Your—your *penchant* does not extend to—to the men,” she remarked a little sarcastically.

Lady Kate felt herself cornered.

“Mason is part Spanish,” she said; “but if he were wholly English, I—I am sure I should love him.”

A few days later the party set sail for England. They bore away with them the keen regrets and felicitations of the widow Beals. Mrs. Langdon watched with great disgust the good woman bestow upon Kitty a hearty kiss.

“It seemed very strange to her,” she remarked—“one of the vulgar mass kissing a titled lady; but then, she must try and bear in mind, what was very proper in America was *exceedingly* improper in England. For her part, she should be very glad to set foot upon her native soil once more. There she knew exactly what to do, and exactly what to expect.”

Nobody felt sorry at her leaving. The widow Beals heaved a sigh of relief. In describing her to a friend, she said: “I can git along with the nobility an’ I can descend to the commoners; but I can’t im-

bibe the middlety. That Mrs. Langdon is neither high nor low; she is jest betwixt an' between."

When lawyer Martins heard of Mason Reynolds' return to England, he thrust his ever busy pen behind his ear, and sat motionless upon his high stool.

"I thought we were well rid of him," he said aloud. "Can the dead return to life? It seems so. His nobleness has received its just reward. I—I wonder if the evil I intended him will receive *its* just punishment? It almost seems we reap as we sow."

Lady Kitty kept her resolution. She made feasts and feasts. Her tenants came and gorged themselves, and went away blessing her—it is so easy to bestow blessings, with a full stomach.

The moonlight silvered the white walls of beautiful Castle Vale. In the garden below it lay like a filmy, wavering veil amid the flowers. The soft, subtle fragrance of the roses stole through the night air, and only the contented twitter of a sleeping bird broke the silence.

"Look," said Mason Reynolds, pointing beneath the marble balcony upon which they stood. "In the shadow of that shrubbery I sat and heard you promise to marry Ralph. I was sick at heart. I had traveled many a mile to hear—only this."

A mischievous light played in the maiden's eyes.

"You know, Mason," she said demurely, "it was only fulfilling the old adage: 'Listeners never hear any good to themselves.'"

"I was not listening," he said, a trifle indignant.

“I was completely exhausted, and had sat down upon yonder bench to rest.”

“We won’t quarrel about it,” said Kitty, composedly. “You ran away, and I ran after you, and fetched you back. It will be useless to try and escape me a second time, Mason. By the by,” she continued presently, “do you know who came to see me to-day?”

“No,” he said indifferently.

“Lady Cecilia Brandon. In spite of the cavalier she regrets you—really regrets you, Mason. To-day when she wished me happiness, I saw tears in her eyes. Poor little lady! I felt sorry for her, but I really couldn’t make the sacrifice.”

“Hush!” said Mason Reynolds. “I can not bear to speak of her.”

She brought back to him too vividly the proud, worldly woman who had been his mother.

The girl looked at him, in sudden fright.

“Why, Mason,” she said tremulously, “you—you surely didn’t care for her?”

“No,” he said gently; “it is not that.”

Even from the woman he loved he would shield his mother’s folly.

“I never loved any one—”

“But my humble self,” said Kitty, completely reassured, sweeping away from him in a long courtesy.

Presently she came back, and raising herself on tip-toe, clasped her hands behind his head.

“Mason,” she said solemnly, “I am so happy to-night, that it makes me appear light and trifling; but

I would have you remember, nobody in all this world loves you as I do."

"Oh, sweet!" he said, bending until his gray head touched her golden locks, "I have lost everything but you, and in you I have found all I lost."

So they were married. The ceremony took place in the little church in the village. All the villagers came in their best clothes, and approved the act. Lord Ralph Grantly gave away the bride. He made no outward sign, yet it almost broke his great heart. In the years to come, Fate was sweet to him. She brought him no other woman's love, but a high companion who dwelt within his soul, and lent his brush such heavenly arts that all the world united to ring his praise.

THE END.





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